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**LIBERALISM AND ITS VALUES**

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**Dissertation submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree  
of Master of Research**

**September 2011**

***Abstract:***

This dissertation seeks firstly to expose the fundamental difficulties associated with liberal attempts at conflict mediation, and subsequently to consider how these can be overcome through the development of post-liberalism and agonism. As highlighted by events such as the July 7th London bombings and the 2011 UK riots, values in pluralist society – such as those held by Marxist; feminist; religious; and ethnic groups – are often incompatible and incommensurable with one another. The dissertation aims to unearth liberal universalism as an aggravator of these pluralist tensions, increasing the potential for fundamentalism and the outbreak of conflict. It will argue that claims about the neutrality and universality of its principles, alongside its employment of a fixed public-private distinction, renders liberal universalism an oppressive theory that suppresses politics. Subsequent to forming this normative critique of liberal universalism, the dissertation will then examine post-liberal attempts to abandon neutrality and universality in favour of radical choice and contingency. Post-liberalism aims to provide a less oppressive alternative and to revive politics. However, I will suggest that post-liberal aspirations toward radical choice and contingency can neither overcome oppression, nor revive politics, unless it renegotiates the fixed public-private divide. The dissertation argues that agonism fills this gap by reworking the public-private distinction. It illustrates how agonism employs a similar rejection of liberal neutrality and universality, endorsing the same radical choice and contingency advocated by post-liberalism. The dissertation then considers how agonism builds on this through notions of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness, both of which allow it to renegotiate the public-private distinction. I will then discuss how renegotiation surmounts both the oppression of pluralist groups and the suppression of politics, encouraging citizens to engage publicly in the continual contestation of existing values. In

so doing, the paper aspires to demonstrate how agonism builds on post-liberal advancements to offer us a less oppressive, more diverse alternative, rendering it a favourable conflict mediator to liberal universalism.

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## ***Introduction***

### ***Mediating Pluralist Conflict***

*'Pluralism emerges as a possibility to pursue rather than the certain effect of determinate conditions. To the extent that it is attained, it remains a fragile achievement to be cherished rather than an outcome to take for granted.'* (William E. Connolly, 2005)

This dissertation seeks to explore the fundamental difficulties associated with liberal universalist attempts at conflict mediation and to suggest that both post-liberalism and agonism aspire to overcome these. Aims at conflict mediation occur within the context of a multicultural, pluralist Britain whereby a range of actors, including gay rights advocates; pro-choice abortion campaigners; religious groups and ethnic communities, endorse numerous value systems. Although a key component of British society, the pluralist nature of these values often results in incompatible or incommensurable conflict. Richard Bellamy defines pluralism as the existence of an array of moral and non-moral values that 'may prove either inherently or contingently incompatible.'<sup>1</sup> He affirms that the incompatibilities that arise from pluralism 'unsettle the theory and practice of politics'<sup>2</sup>, thereby posing a challenge to attempts at conflict mediation. This challenge is evident in this summer's UK riots, whereby thousands of British citizens carried out a series of lootings and disturbances on other members of their own communities. This pluralist conflict not only resulted in economic devastation, but also had damaging social consequences, fragmenting communities and increasing the potential for further violent pluralist conflict as a result.

In addition to the threat posed by social fragmentation, pluralist society is also endangered by fundamentalism. William E. Connolly describes fundamentalism as 'a general imperative to assert an absolute, singular

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<sup>1</sup> Bellamy, Richard, *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 1.



ground of authority; [and] to ground your own identity and allegiances in this unquestionable source.<sup>3</sup> The danger of relentlessly imposing a system of values, expressing unwavering loyalty to it, is underlined by instances of domestic and international terrorism such as the July 7<sup>th</sup> London bombings and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. During these events, Islamic fundamentalists sought to assert their values as an absolute ground of authority, unquestioningly rooting their identities and allegiances in Islamic extremism, which led to the indiscriminate killing of thousands of civilians. In addition to causing initial casualties, pluralist fundamentalism can also lead to a cycle of violence, as demonstrated by the reactions that followed September 11<sup>th</sup>. In March this year, a Christian fundamentalist named Terry Jones burnt 200 Qurans in retaliation of the terrorist attacks, which in turn provoked protesters in Afghanistan to attack the UN Assistance Mission, killing over 30 people and injuring over 150.<sup>4</sup> It is thereby evident how often the fundamentalism that arises from pluralist tensions, not only leads directly to conflict, but also initiates a relentless cycle of violence. It is thus evident that diversity in pluralist society carries with it threats of social fragmentation and fundamentalism, both of which increase the potential for violent outbursts of conflict. The initial violence of such outbursts can then aggravate social fragmentation and pluralist tensions, leading to further instances of aggression.

Prior to the Enlightenment period, British society suffered a long history of religious violence as a direct result of the fundamentalist imposition of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Liberalism, with its primary aspirations of freedom and equality,

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<sup>3</sup> Connolly, William E., *The Ethos of Pluralization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), p.105.

<sup>4</sup> CNN Wire Staff, *Protests Continue in Afghanistan against Quran burning*. [online] CNN 2011 [viewed 17 August]. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/04/05/afghanistan.protests/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Palmer, Robert R., *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1964).

arose as a response to such violence and currently remains the prevalent Western ideology within both society and the academy.<sup>6</sup> This field of contemporary political philosophy seeks to consider liberal values with respect to their multicultural, pluralist context. The dissertation will analyse liberal-universalist, post-liberal, and agonistic attempts at pluralist conflict mediation in order to evaluate the effectiveness of these three endeavours.

In analysing the efficacy of the three attempts at conflict mediation, my dissertation will employ a normative methodology, continually asking 'what is the best way to live...[and] concerned with thinking about the world not only as it is but also as we might think it ought to be.'<sup>7</sup> Yet this normative methodology distinguishes itself from that advocated by Rawlsian analytical philosophy, which seeks to show liberal theories as rationally demonstrable. Rather, my dissertation applies an adaptation of the term coined by Richard Rorty as a *Geistgeschichte*, which 'works at the level of problematics... It wants to give plausibility to a certain image of philosophy, rather than to give plausibility to a particular solution of a given philosophical problem.'<sup>8</sup> The dissertation thereby aspires to analyse the fundamental difficulties and merits of the three theories, rather than concerning itself with specific details. In so doing, it rejects the application of empirical methods, whereby 'those who simply use established concepts to get to the facts of political life, those who act unreflectively within the confines of established concepts, actually have the perceptions and modes of conduct available to them limited in subtle and undetected ways.'<sup>9</sup> Instead, it acknowledges such limitations, seeking instead, to challenge the established concepts and their confines by adopting a post-structuralist position. This position promotes the Foucauldian assumption in

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Marsh, David, and Gerry Stoker. *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> Rorty, Richard, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner. *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Connolly, William E, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1983), p. 1.

which, 'our language, and all the assumptions and self-conceptions that it contains, constitutes a structure that is independent of individual decisions and which shapes our outlooks and interactions.'<sup>10</sup> The dominant structures 'make claims to universal truth – truth about human nature, about how the world works, about what makes sense and what doesn't. No claims of this kind can be proven by reference to some ultimate criteria and so constitute exercises in power, imposing conceptions and self-conceptions upon persons.'<sup>11</sup> The dissertation seeks to challenge this imposition of the concepts held by the most powerful doctrines by 'deliberately prob[ing] the conventions governing those concepts.'<sup>12</sup> However, its methodology diverges from genealogy as it does not require an exploration of the history of political thought to expose these 'discursive contexts, suppressed in the course of our often chaotic and fragmentary discursive history.'<sup>13</sup> Instead, it involves a comparison of the three theories within their contemporary pluralist setting, aspiring to provide a conceptual insight into internal concepts and their potential exclusions. The methodology also combines its highly theoretical approach with a practical element, whereby hypothetical examples of value conflict both support and substantiate the theory. These examples include conflict between liberals and communities with regards to marriages requiring conversion to a particular community; pro-choice and pro-life advocates concerning abortion and euthanasia; liberals and Muslims regarding the public wearing of burkha; and, finally, liberals and gay rights campaigners with respect to gay marriage.

Chapter one constitutes an exploration of liberal universalist attempts at conflict mediation. Liberal universalism seeks to reduce conflict by promoting freedom and equality by aspiring to create an impartial public sphere, and

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<sup>10</sup> Marsh and Stoker, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Marsh and Stoker, p. 171.

aiming to contain pluralist conflict to the non-public and private spheres. The label 'liberal universalism,' encompassing thinkers such as Ronald Dworkin, Bruce Ackerman and John Rawls, will be employed in order to distinguish this field of liberalism from the various other forms that exist. In particular, the term seeks to distinguish thinkers like John Stuart Mill, who refer to liberalism as one conception of the good,<sup>14</sup> from those liberal universalists who perceive liberal principles to constitute a 'freestanding view.'<sup>15</sup> The first chapter will primarily engage with Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, which are presented as exemplars of liberal universalist thought. The decision to utilise Rawls' liberalism as a sample of the field can be explained by the enormous impact his work, in particular these two texts, has had. Brian Anderson affirms this in the assertion that 'it would be only a slight exaggeration to say that since the 1970s, universities in the English-speaking world (and increasingly elsewhere) have transformed the teaching of political philosophy into an extended commentary on Rawls's thought.'<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it is essential to note that all liberal universalists diverge on certain issues and that Rawls' work cannot be used as an identical model for the rest of the field. Similarly, it is of great significance that liberal universalism is not neatly separable from other versions of liberalism and some aspects may thus overlap with other strands of liberal thought. Yet Rawls' focus on state neutrality, a fixed public-private divide and emphasis on both toleration and individual freedom allow us to employ his work as a symbolic of the liberal universalist field.

This first chapter aspires to demonstrate how Rawls' attempts to mediate pluralist conflict by limiting its entrance into the public sphere. In so doing, he

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<sup>14</sup> Mill, John Stuart, *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women*, (London: Penguin Group, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, Brian, *The Antipolitical Philosophy of John Rawls*. [online]. Public Interest, 2003 [viewed 14 July]. Available from: [http://www.nationalaffairs.com/public\\_interest/detail/the-antipolitical-philosophy-of-john-rawls](http://www.nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/the-antipolitical-philosophy-of-john-rawls)

firstly constructs a political conception 'distinct from the various conceptions of justice'<sup>17</sup> in *A Theory of Justice* and, subsequently, an overlapping consensus which 'tries, then, to present an account of these values as those of a special domain – the political – and hence as a freestanding view'<sup>18</sup> in *Political Liberalism*. Both of these theories seek to attach objectivity and neutrality to their principles in an aspiration of remaining impartial toward pluralist conflict. This neutrality is supplemented by a universalistic element in both texts: *A Theory of Justice* refers to the liberal values chosen in the Original Position as an agreement that 'we can view...from the standpoint of one person selected at random.'<sup>19</sup> Rawls modifies such universalism in *Political Liberalism* by limiting its applicability to the confines of a democratic society in order to adapt to new pluralist concerns. However, the universal authority of liberal principles is still evident *within* these democratic societies. This universalism is implicit in the boundaries that Rawls draws on society through the labels of the 'rational' and the 'reasonable.'<sup>20</sup> In seeking to attach neutrality and universality to its principles, liberal universalism aspires to provide fairness, equality and stability by distancing itself from conflicting comprehensive doctrines. Yet, the dissertation will argue that these attempts at neutrality fail because of our inability to separate ourselves from our attachments. I will employ post-structuralist analyses to expose how claims to neutrality and universality are reliant upon the exclusions of minority groups, ethnic communities and religions. Then, I will explore how upholding such pretences to neutrality and universality prevent citizens from contesting and challenging liberal values, rendering liberal universalism an oppressive theory. I will subsequently argue that the use of terms such as 'freedom' and 'toleration' constitute an attempt to reaffirm liberal values, which further oppresses minority groups. Finally, the dissertation will undertake an exploration of the

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<sup>17</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Rawls, John, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 140.

<sup>19</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 120.

<sup>20</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

liberal universalist public-private separation, which discriminates against those who disagree with the dominant norms in society. The exclusions and assimilation brought about by the fixed public-private separation are apparent in the controversial issue of abortion, which is both a public and private issue. Thus, attempts at relegating issues like abortion to the private sphere, are exclusionary since they fail to reflect the fluidity between the public and private domains. Moreover, the research will suggest that the above combination of liberal universalist attempts at reaffirming liberal values whilst suppressing pluralism exposes the fundamental difficulties intrinsic to liberal universalism. It will thus be illustrated how fundamentalism may be aggravated, rather than mediated, through liberal universalism because of its oppression of minorities and its exclusion of those that do not honour liberal principles.

Chapter two comprises an account of how post-liberal conflict mediation moves beyond liberal universalist attempts. Post-liberalism seeks to reduce conflict by endorsing liberal values, whilst rejecting claims that their nature is either neutral or rationally demonstrable. By terming the work of Joseph Raz, Isaiah Berlin, Richard Rorty and John Gray 'post-liberalism,' I aspire to distinguish it from the preceding field of liberal universalism. The term, borrowed from Gray's own work, encapsulates the field of theorists that come after the liberal universalist field which was influenced by the neutrality and impartiality endorsed by Rawls. The employment of a range of Gray's work as a sample of post-liberal literature is necessary as a result of two elements. Primarily, Gray engages with the work of Raz, Berlin and Rorty, grouping them himself into the field of 'post-liberalism.' Additionally, his work has had significant impact on key agonist thinkers such as William Connolly, Chantal Mouffe and David Owen. As in the first section of the dissertation, it is important to note that the work of the thinkers is not interchangeable and that

Gray's work provides only a sample of post-liberalism rather than an identical replica. Further, it does not exist within a vacuum, and resemblances can be found between post-liberalism and both liberal universalism and agonism. However, it is the unanimous rejection of liberal universalist neutrality and impartiality that allows Gray's thought to 'represent' post-liberalism.

This second chapter aims to demonstrate how post-liberalism seeks to overcome the oppressive and fragmentary elements of liberal universalism by rejecting its focus on neutrality and impartiality. The research will firstly discuss the three inevitabilities of pluralist conflict intrinsic to Berlin's conception of value pluralism. I will then illustrate how Gray develops this in his three forms of incommensurability, which renders us powerless to measure the relative worth of conflicting values in pluralist society. These three notions of incommensurability will then be utilised to emphasise the inability of liberalism to escape such incommensurability. I will also defend Gray's work against charges that assert that the acceptance of inevitable value incommensurability necessarily renders political decisions relativist, in which all moral standards are abolished. Following its exposition of incommensurability, the research will explore the consequent post-liberal abandonment of neutral or universal forms of liberalism. It will discuss Gray's rejection of liberal universalist doctrines based on fixed hierarchies of values, and his alternative proposal for a more political system founded on radical choice rather than rational, insisting upon the necessary contingency of decision making. Finally, I will endorse Gray's rejection of neutrality and universality in favour of a more political, radical and contingent system but contest that, in order to fulfil these aims, it requires the reworking of the public-private separation.

The third and final chapter of the dissertation aspires to show how agonism expands on post-liberal developments of liberal universalism in an attempt at further overcoming oppression and fragmentation. Agonism aspires to reduce pluralist conflict by reworking the public-private divide into a more ambiguous distinction, in which focus upon contestation and the contingency of decision-making aspire to overcome oppression and revive politics. The field of agonism, comprised of thinkers such as Aletta Norval, Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly, both problematises the permanence of the public-private divide and insists upon the contestability and contingency of dominant values, thus separating itself from liberalism. The thinker for this section, William Connolly, has been chosen as a sample of the agonistic tradition on the basis that his work - which is largely perceived to have had huge impact throughout the field in North America and Europe for the past two decades. He also directly engages with the work of both Rawls and Gray, rendering him a relevant thinker for my research. It is of great importance that there are various strands within agonism, and that Connolly's work is only symbolic of its principal ideas. Likewise, agonism does not exist in isolation to contemporary political theory and it is significant that its views often parallel those outside of the field; such as its resonance with Gray's work. However, it is agonism's insistence on the necessity of ensuring both the renegotiation of the public-private divide and the contestability and contingency of dominant values that groups agonist thinkers together.

This third chapter aspires to show how agonism utilises, and expands upon, post-liberal thinking by outlining the key elements of a renegotiated public-private divide. This renegotiation seeks to offer a less oppressive, less fragmentary alternative to conflict mediation than liberal universalism. The section will commence by demonstrating how Connolly's rejection of the conventional notion of pluralism, employed by Rawls, seeks to overcome the



oppression and fragmentation of minority groups in society. The dissertation will then explore how oppression and fragmentation is intensified by the manner in which conventional pluralism negates diversity into Otherness. The research will subsequently utilise Connolly's understanding of identity, demonstrating the relationality and necessary interdependence element of citizens to one another, in order to evoke the oppression caused by the fixed public-private separation. In so doing, I will subsequently analyse agonistic respect and critical responsiveness in order to explore the necessary conditions of public contestation for allowing minority citizens to overcome oppression. Connolly's acknowledgement of the risk involved in such a public contestation of beliefs and faiths will be discussed and defended against charges of cultural relativism. I will assert that Connolly's renegotiation of the public-private divide is a noble attempt at overcoming oppression and exclusion in favour of a radical politics of contingency. However, my final contention is that, Connolly's ethos is overly optimistic in the context of fundamentalist conflict, such as the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings. The research will thus discuss the possibility of supplementing Connolly's theory with both motivational narratives, which provoke actors into engagement and institutions to complement the ethos that he seeks to generate.

The dissertation will then seek to analyse the three forms of conflict mediation contextualised by a pluralist society rife with diverse, conflicting comprehensive doctrines. From a post-structuralist standpoint, the first chapter will seek to expose how false pretences to neutrality and universality, along with a fixed public-private distinction, render liberal universalism an oppressive and fragmentary theory which can aggravate fundamentalist conflict. The second chapter will then aspire to demonstrate how post-liberal thinkers endeavour to overcome such oppression and fragmentation by rejecting claims to neutrality, universality and rationalism, perceiving

liberalism as one doctrine amongst many. Yet, the research will conclude that its failure to rethink the public-private divide prevents post-liberalism from applying its radical choice and contingency. The dissertation thus concludes that it cannot overcome the oppression and fragmentation of liberal universalism unless it reworks the public-private separation. Finally, the third chapter will aim to illustrate the agonistic rethinking of the public-private divide and how its insistence upon public contestation, the contestability of norms and the contingency of decision-making overcome the oppression and fragmentation in the manner that post-liberalism aspires to do so. However, it will be contended that in order to fulfil its aspirations in practice, Connolly's agonism requires the aid of both a motivational narrative and institutions.

## ***Chapter One***

### ***The Liberal Universalism of John Rawls***

*'By avoiding comprehensive doctrines we try to bypass religion and philosophy's profoundest controversies so as to have some hope of uncovering a basis of a stable overlapping consensus.'*

(John Rawls, 2005)

Through consideration of the work of John Rawls, this section of the dissertation aspires to expose the difficulties inherent within liberal universalism. Firstly, it demonstrates how Rawls acknowledges the inevitability of pluralist conflict, seeking to mediate this through the provision of a separate political conception and an overlapping consensus. Rawls aims to distinguish this political conception from comprehensive doctrines, aspiring to fairness, equality and stability through the endorsement of neutrality. Yet, I will argue that attempts at neutrality are flawed since our identities are not distinguishable from our attachments. Then I will explore how the false insistence on neutrality imposes an oppressive universalism on citizens, rendering them unable to contest the liberal hegemony. Furthermore, the chapter will argue that Rawls's blindness to his universalism is a form of fundamentalism, which suppresses cultural diversity. I will consider the ways in which principles of freedom and toleration are utilised primarily to reaffirm liberal values and are thus not fully extended to minority groups. Finally, I will discuss how the public-private distinction can exclude and oppress citizens. Moreover, I will suggest that the combination of reaffirming liberal values alongside the suppression of pluralism could render liberal universalism a theory, with devastating effects on pluralist conflict.

John Rawls provides a noble attempt at mediating conflict in *A Theory of Justice*, in which he acknowledges that 'society is typically marked by a

conflict as well as by an identity of interests,<sup>21</sup> and subsequently seeks to reduce such disagreement. He reasons that, as a result of social diversity, 'what is just and unjust is usually in dispute,<sup>22</sup> and, consequently, society cannot be based on a conception of justice endorsed by any one comprehensive doctrine. Rawls explains that rather than founding society on a particular one of these doctrines, 'it seems natural to think of the conception of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice.'<sup>23</sup> Peter Mandle affirms that what distinguishes the liberal conception of justice from those diverse private conceptions is its focus 'on the basic structure of society. We are not aiming to establish a comprehensive account of morality.'<sup>24</sup> Rawls' work is thereby an example of a deontological approach, which refuses to concern itself with an account of morality. Instead, it emphasises the importance of creating 'a characteristic set of principles for assigning basic rights and duties,<sup>25</sup> in an attempt at avoiding the value conflicts existent between the diverse private conceptions.

In deciding upon which principles this separate political conception should be founded upon, Rawls employs both the Original Position and the Veil of Ignorance. The original position is a hypothetical situation in which all knowledge is restricted from the individual regarding, firstly, information about their society, and, secondly, their status within that society. Samuel Freeman explains the importance of restricting knowledge of the society, stating that it aims toward an impartial conception whose 'principles of justice are not contoured to the conditions of any particular social situation or designed to promote or especially favour any particular conception of the good.'<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>21</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Mandle, Jon, *Rawls's A Theory of Justice: an introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Freeman, Samuel, *Rawls*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 13.

simultaneously preventing the progression and regression of particular sectors of society, Rawls' liberalism comprises an attempt at providing 'a framework or an arena for a fair agreement.'<sup>27</sup> In placing a veil of ignorance over knowledge of the society then, Rawls' theory aspires toward an impartial, fair and equal means of choosing the principles of justice.

Along with restricting the individual's knowledge of his society, the veil of ignorance also ensures that the individual is ignorant of his own class, social status and the attributes he possesses. Rawls explains that in so doing, 'one excludes the knowledge of these contingencies which sets men at odds and allows them to be guided by their prejudices.'<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the liberal universalist decision to restrict the knowledge of the individual with regards to his own position also aims to provide a fair and equal foundation in which 'no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances.'<sup>29</sup> Thus, since the citizen is unaware of his socio-economic position, the veil of ignorance assumes that he could imagine himself as the most disadvantaged member, encouraging principles to be chosen that even the most deprived could endorse. In Rawls' theory, this is essential to forming the basis of society because 'only a set of principles that protects everyone's fundamental interests will be acceptable to everyone.'<sup>30</sup> Mandle explains this, in asserting that 'if we can identify the principles that [those in the original position] would find to be the most acceptable, then we have good reason to believe that those principles would be fair to everyone, and this is exactly what we want.'<sup>31</sup> In this manner, liberal universalism is said to prevent the most advantaged sectors exploiting society, and thereby reduces the inequalities that lead to

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, Rex, *Rawls and Rights*, (Lawrence, Kansas: Kansas University Press, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Mandle, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Mandle, p. 14.

social fragmentation. Therefore, both components of the veil of ignorance - restricting knowledge of both the status of society and the status of the individual within that society - aspire toward a fair and equal basis on which to found the principles of justice.

Thus, both knowledge restrictions imposed by the veil of ignorance aim to allow a fair and equal society which neither advances nor limits the interests of any sector of society. John Gray explains that, in order to achieve this desired fairness and equality, the principle of neutrality is essential to liberal universalist theories such as *A Theory of Justice*. He explains that 'the paradigmatic liberal concern...is equality...which dictates - for governments, at least neutrality with regard to their various conceptions of the good life.'<sup>32</sup> Rawls also acknowledges this in *A Theory of Justice*, in which he refers to its conditions as 'embody[ing] those of objectivity.'<sup>33</sup> He shows that, in aiming toward fairness and equality, neutrality requires 'us to consider the choice of principles unencumbered by the singularities of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.'<sup>34</sup> Hence, in order to achieve a neutral framework that aims to promote equality and fairness, Rawls employs methods such as the original position's veil of ignorance to 'prevent us from shaping our moral view to accord with our own particular attachments and interests.'<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is the focus on neutrality in liberal universalist theories that mirrors liberal aspirations of equality by attempting to prevent the promotion of a single set of interests.

According to Rawls, 'without these limitations on knowledge the bargaining problem of the original position would be hopelessly complicated.'<sup>36</sup> This

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<sup>32</sup> Gray, John, *Liberalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 119.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 453.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

echoes his previous assertion that social diversity renders clashes over justice inevitable. Thus, employment of neutrality not only seeks fairness and equality, but also aspires to reduce conflict. It does so by displacing diverse individuals from their personal belief systems, which inevitably contain elements that are either incompatible or incommensurable with those of others. Rawls asserts that, whereas conflict is inevitable between conflicting belief systems, 'once knowledge is excluded, the requirement of unanimity is not out of place.'<sup>37</sup> He explains that 'one consequence of trying to be objective, of attempting to frame our moral conceptions and judgments from a shared point of view, is that we are more likely to reach agreement.'<sup>38</sup> Thus according to liberal universalists, it is precisely this neutrality that 'permit[s] essential understandings to be reached,'<sup>39</sup> and consensus to be formed. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* considers this consensus to be universally applicable, asserting that 'we can view the agreement in the original position from the standpoint of one person selected at random.'<sup>40</sup> Thus, theories like Rawls' attempt to provide neutrality as a gateway to fairness and equality. This offers a noble attempt at conflict reduction through the development of a universally applicable consensus on the principles of justice.

In addition to aspiring toward equality and conflict reduction, Rawls aims to allow the existence of 'a stable and just society'<sup>41</sup> through his agreed political conception. The existence of diversity and conflict between differing private conceptions of the good leads to Rawls' aforementioned assumption that no single private conception of justice can be endorsed by all of society. The affirmation of one such doctrine would thus be exclusionary and fail to encourage social unity, leading to fragmentation and instability. Additionally,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 453.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 454.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 133.



this private conception might even clash directly with the conception to which another is loyal, thereby failing to provide social unity and stability, increasing the potential for both fragmentation and conflict as a result. Quite contrarily, Rawls states that the 'principles [of his political conception of justice] are to be universal in application,<sup>42</sup> and are to be perceived as distinct from those private ones. This ensures that 'those who hold different conceptions of justice can still agree<sup>43</sup> to its implementation. Hence, in aspiring to create a conception that can be endorsed by the whole of society, irrespective of their individual conceptions of justice, Rawls seeks to 'establish the bonds of civic friendship,<sup>44</sup> thereby aiming to both eliminate social fragmentation and promote social unity. Aspiring to overcome the exclusionary nature of one particular private conception, Rawls' agreed political conception thus strives to maintain impartiality in order to be universally applicable. This universality constitutes an attempt at surmounting the threat of social fragmentation by attempting to enhance stability through social unity.

Rawls attempts, through the device of the original position, to provide a fair and equal framework upon which to replace conflict with stability. He assumes that two principles of justice would be chosen. Reflecting the liberal prioritisation of fairness and equality, 'the two principles impose a kind of egalitarianism – even if not strict equality – on the design of the basic structure.<sup>45</sup> The first principle of justice states that 'each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.<sup>46</sup> The aim of this is to create a political structure that guarantees the basic liberties, defined in *A Theory of Justice* as political freedom, freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of

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<sup>42</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Mandle, p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 53.

conscience and freedom of thought, freedom of the person, the right to hold personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure.<sup>47</sup> Echoing aims of equality advocated by the veil of ignorance, the first principle 'simply requires that certain sorts of rules, those defining basic liberties, apply to everyone equally and that they allow the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all.'<sup>48</sup> Hence, the first principle protects against inequalities within the basic liberties, and Rawls confirms that these liberties 'can be limited and compromised only when they conflict with other basic liberties.'<sup>49</sup> Consistent with the original position's emphasis on equality then, the first principle seeks to provide equal freedom to all, aspiring towards a fair political structure of society.

The second principle of justice, the 'difference principle,' applies to 'the institutions that regulate social and economic inequalities.'<sup>50</sup> Rawls states that 'while the distribution of wealth and income need not be equal, it must be to everyone's advantage, and at the same time, positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all.'<sup>51</sup> Thus, the second principle attempts to prevent inequalities both by ensuring that inequality only exists if it advantages all sectors of society, and by opening positions of responsibility to everyone. It is important to note that 'the baseline from which we assess prospective gains and losses is one of equality, not the inequalities that might currently exist in an actual society. If there currently are unjust inequalities, the difference principle may very well sanction losses to the wealthy in order to achieve gains for the poor.'<sup>52</sup> The difference principle thereby rearranges social and economic inequalities to ensure that the least advantaged are

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>50</sup> Mandle, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Mandle, p. 51.

benefited most greatly. In only allowing social inequalities that favour the less fortunate, Rawls' theory continues to aspire toward equality.<sup>53</sup>

The application of Rawls' principles of justice employs the same neutrality and impartiality that is emphasised during their choosing. Rawls asserts that 'the acceptance of the two principles constitutes an understanding to discard as irrelevant as a matter of social justice much of the information and many of the complications of everyday life.'<sup>54</sup> Thus, just as the original position requires distance between the individual and his private beliefs, Rawls calls for a similar separation of the application of the two principles of justice and many of the issues alongside which they are employed. This thereby comprises a further attempt at fairness and equality, ensuring that no particular sector of society is either advantaged or disadvantaged.

The notion of distancing political principles from varying private conceptions is both continued and expanded in Rawls' *Political Liberalism* through the founding of an overlapping consensus, which seeks to mediate disagreements. *Political Liberalism* acknowledges the emergence of pluralism and multiculturalism, which bear witness to new challenges in conflict prevention. It asserts that 'modern democratic society is characterized not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines.'<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Rawls explains that *Political Liberalism* refers to the society in *A Theory of Justice* 'once it is adjusted to the fact of reasonable pluralism.'<sup>56</sup> Following the emergence of such pluralism, *Political Liberalism* thus claims to

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<sup>53</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 67. - Such notions of fairness and equality are implicit in Rawls' rejection of utilitarianism, which concerns itself purely with the *average* well-being of society, remaining indifferent as to how benefits are distributed, even if this is at the detriment of the least advantaged. Rawls deems this to be insensitive.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>55</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. xviii.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. Xxxviii.

abandon the universality of *A Theory of Justice*, focusing instead upon the model of 'a well-ordered liberal society'<sup>57</sup> and 'the idea of citizenship in a democratic regime.'<sup>58</sup>

*Political Liberalism's* task then, is to create an overlapping consensus for a society in which 'citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines.'<sup>59</sup> Just as Rawls claims that the political conception outlined in *A Theory of Justice* is 'distinct from the various conceptions of justice,'<sup>60</sup> and consequently neutral with regards to private morality, he also states that the overlapping consensus 'looks for an idea of rational advantage...that is independent of any particular comprehensive doctrine.'<sup>61</sup> *Political Liberalism* mirrors *A Theory of Justice's* earlier assumption that conflict is inevitable between diverse private conceptions, explaining that, 'comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrines likewise cannot be endorsed by citizens generally.'<sup>62</sup> In a similar manner to *A Theory of Justice*, *Political Liberalism* seeks to distance its overlapping consensus from these comprehensive doctrines in order that it 'is not viewed as incompatible with basic religious, philosophical, and moral values.'<sup>63</sup> According to Rawls, this encourages social unity by providing 'common ground – or if one prefers, neutral ground – given the fact of pluralism.'<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the overlapping consensus is supposed to be inclusive of all citizens, ensuring fairness and equality, and thereby encouraging social unity. In addition to endeavours of fairness, equality and unity, the overlapping consensus also reflects the necessity for stability emphasised in *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls states that 'stability is possible when the doctrines

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. Xxxviii.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. Xxxviii.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 180.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

making up the consensus are affirmed by society's politically active citizens and the requirements of justice are not too much in conflict with citizens' essential interests.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the overlapping consensus continues to seek fairness and equality through impartiality; whilst promoting unity and stability through commonalities. In promoting fairness, equality, unity and stability, Rawls' notion of overlapping consensus aims to prevent fragmentation in order to minimise pluralist conflict.

The overlapping consensus constitutes a further attempt at replacing conflict with stability by, firstly aiming to maintain impartiality toward comprehensive doctrines and, subsequently attempting to relegate moral concerns to the private realm. Rawls clarifies that in order 'to maintain impartiality between comprehensive doctrines, [the overlapping consensus] does not specifically address the moral topics on which those doctrines divide.'<sup>66</sup> The decision not to address specific questions of morality is explicated in his affirmation that 'by avoiding comprehensive doctrines we try to bypass religion and philosophy's profoundest controversies.'<sup>67</sup> *Political Liberalism's* silence on these issues thus develops the assumption in *A Theory of Justice* that states that the very diversion away from 'a comprehensive account of morality'<sup>68</sup> reduces conflict. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Rawls is not ignorant to the existence of diversity between differing religious, philosophical and moral doctrines, perceiving them 'as a permanent feature of [the] public culture [of democratic societies]'.<sup>69</sup> In order to acknowledge their permanent existence, *Political Liberalism* creates two alternative spheres distinct from the public realm of constitutional matters and those of basic justice. In these two realms of the non-public and the private, individuals can practice their

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. xxx.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>68</sup> Mandle, p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 136.

particular doctrines.<sup>70</sup> The non-public sphere encompasses issues that have a public role but do not claim to be freestanding views, and the private sphere is constituted by private doctrines held by individuals, which have no bearing on the public realm. By transferring diverse, conflicting doctrines away from the public realm, *Political Liberalism* constitutes an attempt at mediating pluralism by 'reducing the conflict between political and other values.'<sup>71</sup> In addition to seeking conflict reduction, the public-private separation also ensures that the 'form and content [of the overlapping consensus] are not affected by the existing balance of political power between comprehensive doctrines.'<sup>72</sup> This thereby prevents citizens from withdrawing support of the political conception if their particular private conception should become dominant.<sup>73</sup> It is evident then, that *Political Liberalism's* public-private separation aims not only toward conflict reduction, but also toward the social stability advocated in *A Theory of Justice*. The relegation of comprehensive doctrines to the non-public and private spheres resultantly seeks to establish a stable public political arena, distanced from pluralist conflict and its changing power relations, whilst simultaneously allowing diversity to exist elsewhere.

The separation of the public and private spheres is coupled with the notion of individual freedom, a principle that comprises a fundamental part of *Political Liberalism's* overlapping consensus. Rawls explains that 'citizens think of themselves as free in three respects: first, as having the moral power to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good; second, as being self-authenticating sources of valid claims; and third, as capable of taking responsibility for their ends.'<sup>74</sup> Once citizens secure their freedom in these respects, Rawls perceives them to be 'both rationally and fully

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

autonomous.<sup>75</sup> By granting freedom to citizens in this way, Rawls seeks to fulfil Isaiah Berlin's notion of 'negative liberty',<sup>76</sup> in which citizens 'are free within the limits of political justice to pursue their (permissible) conceptions of the good.'<sup>77</sup> In enabling the individual to pursue Berlin's notion of 'negative liberty,' *Political Liberalism* thereby seeks to fulfil notions of fairness and equality advocated in *A Theory of Justice*, in order that comprehensive doctrines are protected from intervention.

An additional attempt at providing the fairness and equality advocated in the original position is evident in Rawls' claim that 'political liberalism applies the principle of toleration to philosophy itself.'<sup>78</sup> Although a diverse range of standpoints exists in the private sphere, *Political Liberalism* asserts that 'others who affirm doctrines different from ours are...certainly not unreasonable.'<sup>79</sup> Thus in refraining from labelling diverse doctrines as 'unreasonable' and thereby including them in society, *Political Liberalism* aspires to treat all reasonable comprehensive doctrines fairly and equally, irrespective of its view of them. In so doing, Rawls employs the principle of toleration by which he asserts that 'political liberalism does not attack or criticize any reasonable view.'<sup>80</sup> Thus *Political Liberalism* requires that citizens 'see that the burdens of judgment set limits on what can reasonably be justified to others, and so they endorse some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought,'<sup>81</sup> encouraging toleration. Evidently, then, liberal toleration constitutes yet another attempt at promoting fairness and equality by aspiring to protect the basic liberties enlisted in *A Theory of Justice's* first principle of justice.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 72

<sup>76</sup> see Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*.

<sup>77</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. xxi.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

The importance of toleration should not be underestimated in its efforts to contradict the historical premise that 'social unity and concord requires agreement on a general and comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine.'<sup>82</sup> Prior to liberal toleration, 'intolerance was accepted as a condition of social order and stability,<sup>83</sup> yet, quite contrarily, *Political Liberalism* argues that it is precisely this toleration that creates social order and stability. Rawls explains that when 'the virtues of tolerance and being ready to meet others halfway...are widespread in society and sustain its political conception of justice, they constitute a very great public good, part of society's political capital.'<sup>84</sup> Thereby through toleration of diverse doctrines the ideals of social unity and stability are promoted.

Rawls' continuous employment of state neutrality in both *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* aspires to provide principles acceptable to all citizens, irrespective of their loyalty to a particular comprehensive doctrine. Owen explains that in so doing, 'Rawls is precisely articulating a view from nowhere.'<sup>85</sup> In articulating a view from nowhere through both the original position's political conception of justice and the overlapping consensus, liberal universalism assumes that it is possible to separate oneself from one's attachments when choosing the principles of justice. Liberal universalism takes the view that 'I choose to "clothe" myself in these beliefs but, however deeply I am attached to them, they are not essentially part of who I am.'<sup>86</sup> The use of a veil of ignorance and Rawls' subsequent overlapping consensus hence infer that citizens employ their ability to distance themselves from their private attachments in order to make impartial decisions that serve as the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. xxvii.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. xxvii.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, David, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p. 137.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 135.



neutral basis of society. However, communitarians such as Michael Sandel, reason that, indeed, 'the vaunted independence of the deontological subject is a liberal illusion. It misunderstands the fundamentally "social" nature of man, the fact that we are conditioned beings "all the way down."<sup>87</sup> This understanding of man, in which individuals are inseparable from their attachments, resonates with the Nietzschean view which I wish to endorse. David Owen promotes such a view, claiming that liberal universalism underestimates the significance of these attachments to the individual, in the assertion that 'the individual and, in particular, the individual's self-understanding are the product of a complex history of the entwinement of judgement and agency in the life of a community.'<sup>88</sup> An individual's existence then, is constituted by his history, and it is thereby impossible for him to exist without the attachments intrinsic to that history. As a result, the Nietzschean perspective rejects the possibility of drawing a dividing line to distinguish between a person and their attachments. This thus affirms that, 'our consciousness is inseparable from the judgements (including conceptions of the good) which are exhibited.'<sup>89</sup> Iris Marion Young states that even if we create a hypothetical situation, such as the original position, in order to exclude the attachments of individuals, we can never achieve impartiality because the attachments will still exist. She explains that, 'feelings, desires, and commitments do not cease to exist and motivate just because they have been excluded from the definition of moral reason. They lurk as inarticulate shadows.'<sup>90</sup> Liberal universalist attempts at removing attachments from the decision-making process are flawed. As a result, the choosing of both the political conception and the overlapping consensus is neither impartial nor neutral. Moreover, both *A Theory of Justice's* conception of justice and

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<sup>87</sup> Sandel, Michael, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 11.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>90</sup> Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 103.

*Political Liberalism*'s overlapping consensus reflect attachments intrinsic to the liberal tradition, and their principles are thus rooted with liberal ideas that reflect 'the ideals implicit in the public culture of a democratic society.'<sup>91</sup> Consequently, the liberal universalist attempt at associating liberalism with neutrality, 'is a mistaken and self-defeating strategy.'<sup>92</sup>

In order to demonstrate the liberal ontology that shapes liberal principles, it is imperative to consider them from the perspective of the ethnic communities, religious parties, and minority groups that exist in multicultural, pluralist society. John Gray refutes the automatic prioritisation that liberal universalism attaches to its own values. He demonstrates how this can curtail pluralism, asking why 'liberty should always trump variety?'<sup>93</sup> William Galston expands on this with reference to the liberal prioritisation of individual freedom, affirming that 'from a value-pluralist standpoint, there are many valuable ways of life, individual and collective, that are not autonomous in the sense that they are not the product of conscious reflection and choice but rather of habit, tradition, authority, or unswerving faith.'<sup>94</sup> An example of tradition and unswerving faith triumphing over individual freedom is apparent in the marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim requiring the conversion of the non-Muslim to Islam. There is a clear incompatibility of values here between the liberal (individual freedom) and the religious (loyalty to the community) in which the necessity to convert clearly renders fidelity to tradition and faith superior. Hence the decision to act on tradition and faith rather than individual freedom renders false the neutrality attached to the choosing of principles under the veil of ignorance. It follows then, that its assumed prioritisation of liberal values is not a neutral notion at all, but one

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<sup>91</sup> Mouffe, Chantal, *The Return of the Political*, (London: Verso, 1993), p. 48.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>93</sup> Gray in Galston, William, 'Value Pluralism and Liberal Political Theory' in *American Political Science Review*, 93(4): 1999, p. 774.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 772.

that reflects its liberal roots. Mouffe concludes that Rawls believes his political conception and overlapping consensus to 'start from the fundamental intuitive ideas present in our societies. He sees it as self-evident and uncontroversial, but it is not... From the point of view [of minority groups; communities and religions], the "neutral" principles of rational dialogue are certainly not so.<sup>95</sup>

The inability to provide neutrality and impartiality is further evident if we analyse Rawls' claim that *Political Liberalism* does not take a stance on abortion. He emphasises that liberalism does not pre-empt the outcome, but instead relegates the decision to public debate, rather than limiting it to the private sphere.<sup>96</sup> However, since abortion is allowed to exist as a public option, whereas the death penalty, for instance, is banned, the restrictions drawn on public debate somewhat pre-empt its outcome. In deciding which controversial issues are eligible to exist as options for debate, Rawls' liberal universalism is neither neutral, nor impartial. This is highly apparent when we consider the view of a pro-life advocate, for whom allowing the potential for abortion goes against their deepest convictions. It is therefore clear that Rawls' attempts at providing a neutral and impartial framework are flawed. Instead, liberal values are infused with a liberal ontology.

Liberal universalism thereby excludes certain sectors of society by reasserting the dominance of its values through pretences to neutrality. Yet the crux of the problem is not liberal universalism's failure to be neutral, it is the confidence with which it asserts such neutrality. Young states that neutrality constructs a 'hierarchical opposition between what lies inside and what lies outside the category, valuing more what lies inside than what lies outside.'<sup>97</sup> Thus, in insisting upon the neutrality of liberal universalism, and thereby

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<sup>95</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p.p. 143-145.

<sup>96</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

<sup>97</sup> Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 102.

creating an 'inside', Rawls could oppress and fragment minority groups in pluralist society by depicting dominant liberal interests as the most valuable, excluding difference as a result. John Keane highlights the dangers of constructing this 'inside,' demonstrating how neutrality not only negates difference, but also unquestioningly reaffirms the dominant hegemony. He affirms that neutrality 'perform[s] this legitimating function, paradoxically, by portraying the dominant private interests of civil society in grandiose formulations which make them appear, falsely, as detached and universal interests.'<sup>98</sup> Thus, the content of the values Rawls offers to us are unquestioningly affirmed and reaffirmed as a consequence of their claims to neutrality and impartiality. Ruth Abbey consequently labels liberal neutrality as a 'disguised conservation' since it 'effectively reinforces the status quo.'<sup>99</sup> The employment of liberal neutrality as a tool to legitimise the liberal hegemony allows liberal universalism to claim its applicability to the whole of society, in spite of the aforementioned incompatibilities, incommensurabilities and exclusions toward alternate values. This tool consequently ensures that liberal principles remain uncontested. William Connolly explains the danger that this poses, stating that professions to neutrality lead value-laden liberal principles to be perceived as 'natural or intrinsically true standards'<sup>100</sup> that are 'beyond the need of self-problematisation and ambiguation.'<sup>101</sup> Since claims to neutrality blind citizens to the liberal roots of the dominant values in their society, they become unable to challenge the legitimacy of their content. It follows that when values endorsed by minority groups and communities clash with those advocated by liberal universalism, the minority is powerless to contest the liberal universalism. This renders liberalism's values exclusionary and oppressive.

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<sup>98</sup> Keane, John, *Democracy and civil society – on the predicaments of European socialism, the prospects for democracy, and the problem of controlling social and political power*, (London: Verso, 1998), p. 214.

<sup>99</sup> Abbey, Ruth, *Charles Taylor*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 144.

<sup>100</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p.p. 88 - 89

<sup>101</sup> Abbey, Ruth, p. 147.

The universal authority implicated through such professions to neutrality reflects the origins of liberal thought whereby 'liberal demands were seen by liberals themselves as the demands, not of any sectional interest or cultural circle, but of all humanity.'<sup>102</sup> This is evident in *A Theory of Justice* in which Rawls asserts that the principles of justice are 'the choice which rational men would make in this hypothetical situation of equal liberty, assuming for the present that this choice problem has a solution.'<sup>103</sup> He thus sees the principles of justice to be rationally discoverable by all men. The universality that Rawls attaches to the rationale of choosing such principles is explicit in his affirmation that 'we can view the agreement in the original position from the standpoint of one person selected at random.'<sup>104</sup> Thus, the universalism in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* is implicit in its attempts at both standing apart from conflict, and employing principles that would be chosen by *all* rational actors. This universalism shifts in *Political Liberalism* whereby its adaptation to the concerns of a modern, democratic society abandons former possibilities for global application. However, Rawls still assumes a universalist interpretation of human reason and rationale when employing liberal values, evident in his emphasis on the 'rational' and the 'reasonable.' He refers to *Political Liberalism's* overlapping consensus as one that all 'rational' persons can accept. Chantal Mouffe explains the universality implicit in the employment of such rationalism in the assertion that 'some liberals, on account of their rationalism, in fact imagine that they can retain the idea of a truth that is discoverable by everyone.'<sup>105</sup> Liberal universalism's usage of such rationalism hence assumes that liberal principles are universal values that all rational people will discover, labelling those that honour alternate values as

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<sup>102</sup> Gray, *Liberalism*, p. 45.

<sup>103</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 11.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>105</sup> Mouffe, Chantal, *Democracy, Power and the Political*. In Benhabib, Seyla, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 121.

'irrational'.<sup>106</sup> Thus, liberal universalism's prioritisation of liberal values as 'rational' alongside its negation of divergent values as 'irrational' both serves to reaffirm the liberal hegemony, and exclude minority groups.

Rawls' application of 'reasonableness' in *Political Liberalism* also stamps a universal authority on liberal principles. The criterion of reciprocity that he outlines in *The Law of Peoples* requires that those proposing the terms of cooperation that they perceive to be the most reasonable 'must also think it as at least reasonable for others to accept them.'<sup>107</sup> Yet, as Rawls himself highlights, 'we are using our reason to describe itself and reason is not transparent to itself.'<sup>108</sup> Thus, how can we be sure that what one sector of society considers to be most reasonable for them – and also what they claim to be at least reasonable to other sectors – will not be considered by the other sectors as entirely *unreasonable*? Mouffe underscores the fundamental question that the notion of reasonableness begs, asking 'who decides what is and what is not "reasonable"?'<sup>109</sup> In the case of liberal universalism, 'reasonableness...is defined in terms of the very values and assumptions from which Rawls derives his political liberalism.'<sup>110</sup> Thus, in granting his liberal universalism the authority to decide the values that 'best satisf[y] [the] conditions'<sup>111</sup> of a well-ordered liberal political society, whilst labelling some others as 'unreasonable,' Rawls attaches a universal authority to its values. The danger of this, as Mouffe informs us, is that 'what is at a given moment deemed "rational" or "reasonable" in a community is what corresponds to the dominant language games and the "common sense" that they construe.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> The second chapter of the dissertation discusses this in greater depth whereby John Gray demonstrates how value incommensurability renders rational choice oppressive to minorities.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p.p. 136-137.

<sup>108</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p.p. 96-97.

<sup>109</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p. 143.

<sup>110</sup> Friedman, Marion, *John Rawls and the Political Coercion of Unreasonable People*, in Davion, Victoria and Wolf, Clark, *The Idea of a Political Liberalism: Essays on Rawls*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>111</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. xlvii.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

Hence, the danger is that liberal universalism could employ notions of the 'rational' and the 'reasonable' in order to reaffirm its own position as the dominant hegemony, whilst labelling minority groups as 'irrational' and 'unreasonable' in order to exclude them. This, in turn, could aggravate social fragmentation and oppression, increasing the potential for fundamentalist conflict.

The danger of the universalism that liberal neutrality invokes is that it 'translates some of the very intrasubjective and intersubjective differences...into modes of otherness to be assimilated, punished, or liquidated.'<sup>113</sup> Insistence upon the universalism of such values thereby results in the marginalisation of alternate faiths whereby liberal universalism suppresses their diversity into a negative Other to be eradicated. Connolly explains that 'the more relentless the drive to universalize an existential faith, the more its supporters experience otherwise tolerable differences to be forms of persecution demanding reprisal.'<sup>114</sup> Indeed, the imposition of liberalism as a universal doctrine could aggravate multicultural conflict by firstly excluding those who honour divergent values and subsequently prohibiting them from challenging it. However, it is liberal universalism's blindness to its own universality that *truly* renders it an oppressive theory. This is evident in *Political Liberalism* in which Rawls professes to have abandoned claims to universality by concentrating his theory on democratic societies through which he claims to offer 'no specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself.'<sup>115</sup> However, the continued usage of the 'rational' and the 'reasonable' contradicts this assertion. Connolly claims that when liberal universalists consider fundamentalism, 'they project fundamentalism solely onto the other and fail to recognize its strains in

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<sup>113</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 89.

<sup>114</sup> Connolly, William E, *Pluralism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>115</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. Xxxviii.

themselves.<sup>116</sup> In so doing, liberal universalism can aggravate pluralist conflict, further oppressing and fragmenting minorities by labelling others as fundamentalists, whilst failing to consider their own role.

Aspirations toward neutrality and universality are demonstrated by the separation employed in *Political Liberalism* between the public and private spheres. Through this distinction, Rawls separates society into three parts; the public sphere of constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice; the non-public realm of matters that affect the public sphere but do not claim impartiality; and finally, the private sphere of private assumptions and values that have no bearing on public issues.<sup>117</sup> Thus in order to ensure that all of society can adhere to this consensus, Rawls aspires to neutrality in the public sphere by restricting 'the consensus he hopes to achieve to political justice.'<sup>118</sup> In so doing, liberal universalism assumes that 'the thinner the normative standard, the more universal its claim.'<sup>119</sup> As a result, the public sphere narrows its focus to politics, comprised of constitutional essentials and legislation, in order to provide a neutral consensus that can be universally applicable. However, since liberal universalist attempts of separating people from their attachments failed, so too does the attempt to separate the political neatly from the private. Thus in attempting to limit the public sphere to the purely political, Rawls restricts his public sphere to a thin consensus. As a result of the narrow limits of this consensus, the public sphere becomes void of substance. Mouffe affirms this in the assertion that, 'between the "reasonable" and the "rational" there is no space left for something properly political, whose nature we could establish independently of morality or

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<sup>116</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 125.

<sup>117</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

<sup>118</sup> Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity* p. 155.

<sup>119</sup> Kahn, Paul W, *Putting liberalism in its place*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 13.



economics.<sup>120</sup> This is explained by the very fact that the political cannot be so easily separated from the private. Rather, 'the frontier between public and private is not given once and for all but constructed and constantly shifting.'<sup>121</sup> The fluid nature of this divide is highly evident in the evolution of rights for women. In this instance, the private doctrine held by feminists required a modification of the basic liberties in order to encompass the concerns of women. It is thus evident that often, private attachments spill over into the public sphere. A theory that seeks to prevent this is exclusionary toward the concerns of minority groups in society, such as women. Furthermore, the very fact that the dominant sector of society, i.e. liberalism, decides where to draw the boundaries between the public, non-public and private spheres, renders these exclusions oppressive. As the example of rights for women demonstrates, it is often the case that values perceived by liberals as 'private', and thereby making no impact on political matters, are viewed by others as highly political. In failing to recognise this, liberal universalism's public-private distinction is exclusionary and oppressive. It is evident then, that the shifting overlap between morality and politics is both inevitable and essential to making decisions about controversial political issues. Through seeking to draw a fixed line between the public and private spheres, liberal universalism constitutes an attempt at discovering a common, neutral political arena distinct from moral conflict, but in so doing restricts decision-making to politics and has 'emptied politics of all substance.'<sup>122</sup> In this way, minority groups in pluralist society are restricted from full participation in the public realm, and are excluded and oppressed by the dominant majority.

The liberal prioritisation of individual freedom constitutes an attempt at ensuring the freedom and equality of all peoples advocated in the original

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<sup>120</sup> Mouffe, *Democracy, Power and the Political*, p. 49.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

position. However, Owen asserts that this individual freedom is curtailed since liberal universalism fails to understand 'that the maintenance of our capacities for autonomous reflection and agency is dependent on *communal* practices.'<sup>123</sup> As a consequence of both the thin consensus that founds the public sphere, and the requirement of the fixed public-private distinction that individuals remove their communal attachments before making judgements, liberal universalism prevents the individual from making genuinely autonomous decisions. Since the individual is unable to remove himself from these attachments, and as such his existence is constituted by them, then the liberal universalist insistence upon their removal prevents the individual from acting as himself, thereby depriving him of his freedom. Meanwhile, liberal universalist claims to neutrality impose a universal superiority, enabling its values to be brought into the public sphere. Hence, Marcuse concludes that one can only be truly free during the 'discussion and promotion of alternative policies *within* the status quo.'<sup>124</sup> Therefore liberal universalism's failure to recognise that individuals are constituted by the attachments of their history, community, ethnicity and religion requires that citizens remove part of themselves and behave instrumentally. This resultantly deprives individuals of the ability to act autonomously, thereby prohibiting them from the individual freedom that liberal citizens are granted. The public prevalence of liberal attachments limits genuine freedom to liberals during political decision-making, re-affirming the liberal hegemony, and oppressing minorities as a result. This could once again lead to the aggravation of social fragmentation, leading to further pluralist conflict.

In addition to employing the principle of autonomy in an attempt to provide a fair and equal framework aside from comprehensive doctrines, liberal

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<sup>123</sup> Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, p. 138.

<sup>124</sup> Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 2.

universalism also endorses the notion of toleration. However, Owen informs us that only a limited version of toleration is applied. He claims that liberal universalism is 'tolerant only to the extent that its own presuppositions are accepted.'<sup>125</sup> That is to say, liberal universalism offers toleration only to those who accept its principles, thus employing the notion to secure its own position. Such toleration is not fully extensive, excluding those who refuse its principles as 'irrational' or 'unreasonable.' Even more significantly, liberal universalism utilises the principle of toleration to secure itself as the current dominant hegemony, not only presently, but also for the future. As Owen demonstrates, 'because [Rawls' liberal universalism] argues that a rational commitment to tolerance is *only* possible on the basis of the kind of argument it provides, it rules out of court (as *necessarily* irrational) any contestation of its criteria of tolerance.'<sup>126</sup> Thus, not only does liberal universalism only tolerate those who accept its principles, it also secures the future precedence of liberal values by preventing other honourable values from challenging its criteria. Since a comprehensive doctrine is only tolerated if it 'accepts liberal principles as binding,'<sup>127</sup> Connolly describes toleration as 'one perspective exercising hegemony over the culture [which] allows others to exist as enclaves within it.'<sup>128</sup> Rather than encouraging diversity to flourish, such toleration ensures that pluralism operates within liberal realms, thereby limiting the existence of doctrines to those that are 'deprived of substance.'<sup>129</sup> This consequently ensures that comprehensive doctrines are 'denied equal standing with mainstream society,'<sup>130</sup> and must therefore reaffirm liberal dominance in order to be tolerated. The resultant position of minorities as

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<sup>125</sup> Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, p. 71.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>127</sup> Tan, Kok-Chor, *Toleration, Diversity and Global Justice*, (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 92.

<sup>129</sup> Žižek, Slavov, *The Universal Exception*, (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 162.

<sup>130</sup> Gray, John, *Enlightenment's Wake: politics and culture at the close of the modern age*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 20.

inferior citizens causes further concerns for social fragmentation and fundamentalism.

Such attempts at separating citizens from their attachments then, deprive minority citizens of the individual freedom and toleration sufficient to contest the liberal hegemony. Oppression arises since liberal universalism 'brings a private and contestable secular faith into the public sphere while refusing to sanction the same privilege to nonsecular faiths.'<sup>131</sup> This polarisation between the encouragement of liberal attachments and the prohibition of non-liberal attachments grants liberal citizens full freedom, whilst non-liberals 'are treated instrumentally.'<sup>132</sup> It follows from this that 'the official ideology of liberal society...is of course diversity... [but] the liberal reality is more and more sameness.'<sup>133</sup> Thus in spite of its claims of providing individual freedom and toleration, liberal universalism only tolerates minority groups when they are separated from their attachments and comply to liberal norms. This is detrimental to pluralist society in which 'cultural groups want more than just mere survival; they want also the conditions and resources to be vibrant communities worthy of self-respect and respect from others.'<sup>134</sup> It also adds to the threat of social fragmentation since, as Connolly explains, 'everyone does not become the same in a normalizing society. The opposite is more likely to occur.'<sup>135</sup> This is evident through today's threat of terrorism, in which the imposition of Western values has had a fragmentary effect on diverse cultural groups and led to the emergence of Islamic extremism. Consequently, fundamentalist conflict could be exacerbated by the oppression minorities feel as a result of their inability to express their individual freedom.

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<sup>131</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 130.

<sup>132</sup> Hall, Terry, *Beyond the procedural Republic: The Communitarian Liberalism of Michael Sandel*, in Wolfe, Christopher and Hittinger, John, *Liberalism at the Crossroads: an Introduction to Contemporary Liberal Political Theory and its Critics*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>133</sup> Beiner, Ronald, *What's the matter with liberalism?*, (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California, 1995), p.p. 22-23.

<sup>134</sup> Tan, p. 73.

<sup>135</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 90.

In sum, liberal universalist theories influenced by that of John Rawls, provide commendable attempts at conflict mediation. In aiming towards neutrality, they seek to create a fair and equal basis to provide a stable society distanced from private moral conflicts. They additionally aspire to provide individual freedom and toleration to encourage the fair and equal prospering of private doctrines. Yet, these attempts at neutrality are fundamentally flawed since individuals cannot detach themselves from their assumptions. The values Rawls employs are thus inherently liberal, and often unable to escape the incompatible and incommensurable conflicts that occur between value systems in pluralist society. As a result, claims to neutrality are problematic since they hinder the contestation of liberal values, consequently impeding opportunities for the appreciation of alternative values, and suppressing diversity as a consequence. Moreover, neutrality imposes a universalistic authority, excluding those who disagree with the values it endorses, thereby aggravating oppression and social fragmentation. Furthermore, such universalism renders Rawls' liberalism a form of fundamentalism as a consequence of its failure to acknowledge its own potential for essentialism. Through seeking neutrality and universality, liberal universalism renders itself an incontestable doctrine, which consequently suppresses cultural diversity. The public-private divide is exclusionary to minority groups as it fails to recognise the spill over of private interests into the public domain. Additionally, these exclusions are rendered oppressive by the fact that it is the dominant sector of society who decides where to draw the boundaries between the public, non-public and private spheres. In so doing, Rawls' liberal universalism restricts citizens from employing genuine freedom and toleration, excluding minority groups as a result. Liberal universalism's insistence on neutrality and universality, alongside its public-private distinction, render it an oppressive doctrine. Since liberal domination is reaffirmed at the detriment of pluralism, this could lead

to further social fragmentation and the escalation of conflict, such as rises in religious terrorism, increased support for the Far-Right, and a repeat of the UK riots.

## ***Chapter Two***

### ***The Post-liberalism of John Gray***

*'Many people face conflicts among values for which there is no single right solution. The fact that ways of life honour different goods and virtues is not a mark of imperfection. It is a sign that humans can live well in different ways.'*

(John Gray, 2000)

In examining the work of John Rawls, chapter one aspired to draw out the fundamental difficulties intrinsic to liberal universalist theories. Neutrality and universality were subsequently exposed to be false pretences, posing obstacles to the contestation of dominant values, which excludes and oppresses minority groups as a result. Furthermore, it attempted to demonstrate that both individual freedom and toleration serve to reaffirm the liberal hegemony, and resultantly exclude those who cannot adhere to liberal values. It also sought to reveal how the fixed public-private distinction excludes citizens in an oppressive manner, suppressing pluralism and fragmenting society as a consequence. This chapter will focus on post-liberal thinker John Gray, who draws influence from the work of Isaiah Berlin and Joseph Raz and who attempts to create a value-pluralist interpretation of liberalism.

In this chapter, I seek to analyse the effectiveness of the post-liberal challenge in overcoming liberal universalism's oppressive, exclusionary and often fragmentary nature. Firstly, I will outline Berlin's value pluralism, which illustrates the three ways in which value conflict is inevitable in pluralist society. Then, I will demonstrate how this has led to the development of Gray's three forms of incommensurability, highlighting our inability to measure the relative worth of the conflicting values. Subsequently, these three incommensurabilities will be used both to illustrate liberalism's inability to escape value conflict, and to contest the notion that acceptance of value incommensurability necessarily declines into relativism, in which all moral



standards are abolished. Following its exposition of inevitable incommensurability, this chapter will show the post-liberal abandonment of neutral or universal forms of liberalism. It will discuss Gray's neglect of the liberal universalist construction of fixed value hierarchies, in favour of a more political system, founded on radical choice rather than rational, which insists upon the contingency of decision-making. Finally, it will endorse Gray's rejection of neutrality and universality in favour of a more political, radical and contingent system but contest that to be consistent with these aims, it must address the public-private distinction.

In discussing how liberal universalism suppresses multicultural diversity in pluralist society, it is essential to begin with an exploration of value pluralism. Gray begins with Berlin's three levels of value pluralism. The first of these affirms that value conflicts are inevitable within any given morality, and that when these arise neither theoretical nor practical reasoning has the power to resolve them.<sup>136</sup> For instance, even in societies where liberty and equality are valued by all, the principles 'often collide in practice.'<sup>137</sup> This is evident in the notion of positive discrimination, which demonstrates that, if all citizens are treated equally - and hence the liberal principle of equality is endorsed - then the individual liberties of ethnic minorities or those with disabilities can actually be curtailed. Thus, since equal treatment does not necessarily lead to equality, the principle of equality often collides with that of liberty. It is thereby often the case that for citizens to become equals and receive full access to their individual liberties, positive discrimination is necessary.<sup>138</sup> When conflicts occur between two legitimate values such as liberty and equality, Gray tells us that we cannot employ a theory to rank the relative worth of these values since 'we lack the scales on which these goods might be

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<sup>136</sup> Gray, John, *Berlin*, (London: Fontana Press, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>138</sup> See, for instance, group rights advocates such as Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

weighed.<sup>139</sup> Thus although liberty and equality are both honourable virtues, when they collide, it must be circumstance and not theory, which informs us of how we are to act.

Secondly, as Berlin explores through the idea of positive and negative freedom in *Two Concepts of Liberty*,<sup>140</sup> each individual good itself, is 'internally complex and inherently pluralistic, containing conflicting elements, some of which are constitutive incommensurables.'<sup>141</sup> As a result of the internal diversity of each value then, conflicts are even inevitable within a single value, such as freedom. Conflicts may occur, for instance, between those who advocate freedom of information and those who safeguard freedom of privacy, even though both parties seek to represent the same value of freedom. Just as no theory can dictate the outcome when two different values clash, the internal conflict of a particular value must be decided upon by the very context from which Rawls seeks to distance it.

Thirdly, Berlin refers to cultural variations, which, in spite of endorsing some overlapping values, will give rise to further incommensurabilities by the prioritisation of different values.<sup>142</sup> When a Muslim marries a non-Muslim, as in a previous example, it is often imperative that the non-Muslim convert to Islam. Therefore, despite similarities between liberal and Islamic cultural values, in this instance a conflict may arise between the liberal promotion of the non-Muslim's individual freedom (in which the individual could decide not to convert), and the Islamic prioritisation of allegiance to the religion and community (in which the individual must marry into the faith). Hence, conflict across cultural values lacks the theoretical scale on which values can be ranked, and the outcome must once again be circumstantial.

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<sup>139</sup> Gray, John, *Post-liberalism: Studies in Political Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 65.

<sup>140</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty in Four Essays on Liberty*.

<sup>141</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 43.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

Gray employs Berlin's three components of value pluralism in order to develop three forms of incommensurabilities that inevitably arise between values in multicultural society. The first refers to conventions that prevent goods being exchanged for one another, such as the trading off of money for friendship. Gray explains that, although both money and friendship are valuable goods, social norms in Western society forbid individuals from paying friends for giving their time. As a result, money cannot be exchanged for friendship, and we cannot compare their relative worth. Consequently, two different values cannot be ranked on the same scale, rendering theory powerless in comparing their worth against one another.<sup>143</sup> This is a direct contradiction to Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, which rank justice as the highest principle; and privilege the basic liberties over all other values.

In the second instance of incommensurability, the same value is honoured by different cultures, but its meaning is interpreted in conflicting ways. Gray illustrates that 'in art, we can identify the best among works belonging to the same genre, yet their styles may be too far apart for any judgement of relative worth among the best to be a possibility. Much the same holds in ethics.'<sup>144</sup> This is evident in the varying understandings of the term 'happiness.' Interpretations of this term will diverge according to the various conceptions of the good that people follow. In the same way that it is impossible to compare diverse styles of art even though they are categorised in the same genre, it is impossible to compare the relative worth of the assortment of understandings, even though they are all grouped under the term 'happiness.'

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<sup>143</sup> Gray, John, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

The third and final notion of Gray's incommensurabilities occurs when different cultures value entirely different goods and virtues. Raz explains that incommensurability and incompatibility arise between cultures when 'one yields the conclusion that something is good, and the other the conclusion that the very thing is, in virtue of the same properties, without value, or even bad.'<sup>145</sup> This is evident in the institution of marriage whereby different cultures perceive it as a reflection of a range of different virtues. For example, arranged marriages aspire towards the fulfilment of socio-economic virtues, whereas Islamic marriages must reflect religious and communal allegiance by either occurring within the Islamic faith, or requiring the non-Muslim to convert to Islam. In the same way that 'it makes no sense to try to rank the excellence of Shakespeare, say, against that of the French classicists, Corneille and Racine,'<sup>146</sup> it is impossible to rank the various virtues of marriage honoured in different cultures. Raz explains that this impossibility arises from a lack of criteria on which to value the worth of these goods. He explains that 'a good novelist, for example, might be judged by his humour, his insight and his imaginativeness and his ability to plot. It is possible that our weighting of the different criteria does not establish a complete ranking of all possible combinations.'<sup>147</sup> Since pluralist citizens diverge on the conceptions of the good they pursue, it follows that the criteria upon which they measure values will diverge accordingly. Thus, it is impossible to rank the relative worth of the conflicting values intrinsic to marriage since citizens in arranged marriages are pursuing different conceptions of the good to citizens in Islamic marriages. The values they allege to need to be assessed according to different criteria and cannot be measured against one another.

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<sup>145</sup> Raz, Joseph, *The Practice of Value*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 44.

<sup>146</sup> Gray, *Post-liberalism: Studies in Political Thought*, p. 65.

<sup>147</sup> Raz, Joseph, *The Morality of Freedom*, (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1986), p. 326.

Resultantly then, the combination of Berlin's three components of value pluralism with Gray's three modes of incommensurability show that, within pluralist society, it is not that conflict arises from 'occasional pockets of incommensurability,' but rather that 'incommensurability is pretty pervasive in human life.'<sup>148</sup> In addition to highlighting the inevitability of incompatibilities and incommensurabilities between values, Berlin and Gray both reject the notion that conflicts can be resolved by ranking the relevant values against one another in terms of their worth:

'Values are incommensurable when they cannot be expressed either in terms of each other or by reference to a third term that could serve as a standard unit of measure for comparing them. Thus, if value pluralism is the case, we are confronted with a situation where we have conflicting moral duties that cannot be put into a rank order of importance.'<sup>149</sup>

Berlin and Gray instead seek to advocate the view that conflict arises since 'there are many incompatible and yet decent and worthwhile routes through life,'<sup>150</sup> and thus their relative worth cannot be ranked.

William Connolly informs us that many critics, such as Leo Strauss, confuse the rejection of fixed value hierarchies such as Rawls', with 'cultural relativism, "absolute tolerance," or "the abandonment of all standards."' <sup>151</sup> However, it is essential to note that neither Berlin's value pluralism nor Gray's three incommensurabilities decline into relativism. The notion of incommensurability states that two values cannot be ranked against one

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<sup>148</sup> Gray, Berlin, p. 59.

<sup>149</sup> Moore, Matthew, 'Pluralism, Relativism, and Liberalism' in *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(2): 2009, p. 245.

<sup>150</sup> Raz, *The Practice of Value*, p. 43.

<sup>151</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 41.

another under a given circumstance, yet it does not claim that the values in question cannot be compared to a conception of the good. When measured against a particular conception of the good, one value will rank higher. With regards to euthanasia, for instance, an individual may rank preservation of life higher than quality of life with respect to his conception of the good. However were one of his family members to become fatally ill and suffer immense pain, circumstance renders the relative worth of preservation of life and quality of life incommensurable goods. In this instance, preservation of life would triumph as the most valuable good when measured against a conception of the good, but when the quality of a family member's life is at stake, the relative worth of the two goods cannot be compared. Thus, although we cannot measure the two values against one another, we can still rank them against our notion of the good, preventing incommensurability from declining into relativism. As Moore explains, 'pluralism makes it impossible to show that any value system (such as liberalism) is morally preferable but that there are nonetheless some ways of life that are demonstrably immoral.'<sup>152</sup> Indeed, there are some instances in which values are perceived to be entirely unworthy. Gray affirms that through his three conceptions of incommensurability, he does not wish to assert that 'there are not poor forms of life, cultural as well as individual, which exhibit few excellences, if any, and which are not recognizably any sort of flourishing.'<sup>153</sup> Hence, the value pluralist proposition that conflicts can be resolved in multiple ways does not prevent the exclusion of certain principles if they are considered poor with respect to a conception of the good. The difference to Rawls' liberal universalism is that the boundaries of the acceptable and unacceptable are not defined through consultation with a theoretical scale, but rely on the circumstance in which the forms of life arise.

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<sup>152</sup> Moore, 'Pluralism, Relativism, and Liberalism', p. 245.

<sup>153</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 53.

Rawls acknowledges the inevitability of conflict between divergent comprehensive doctrines, as is evident in both *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*.<sup>154</sup> Yet, he perceives liberal values to be separable from this, aspiring to employ these in order 'to state principles of right and justice that stand aloof from these conflicts.'<sup>155</sup> Gray contests the efficacy of such an ambition, contending that liberal values fail to escape conflict with one another, since 'one basic liberty clashes with another, or with the same basic liberty, or with important social values that are not basic liberties.'<sup>156</sup> Berlin demonstrates this with the example of positive and negative freedom in which the two conceptions 'are rival goods; one negative liberty from coercion and interference will conflict with another; a positive freedom which protects one aspect of personal autonomy can be promoted only by restraining some negative liberties.'<sup>157</sup> Therefore, just as money and friendship cannot be measured against one another, nor can freedom of privacy and freedom of speech. Liberal value-conflicts thus require a judgement to be made about the relative worth of the liberties in question, and yet this ranking would vary according to the decision-maker, just as in non-liberal value conflicts. Gray explains that 'people with differing conceptions of human interests, or who differ in the importance they give to the interests they agree in recognizing, will make different judgements as to which liberties are basic.'<sup>158</sup> It follows then, that as in the examples of Gray's three forms of incommensurability, different people would rank freedom of speech, freedom of privacy and freedom of information differently, according to their conceptions of the good. Thus Gray affirms that Rawls' claim in which reasonable people can agree on

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<sup>154</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Political Liberalism*.

<sup>155</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 34.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

the greatest liberty, is flawed, since circumstance renders it 'indeterminate to the last degree.'<sup>159</sup>

Liberalism's inability to escape these incompatible and incommensurable conflicts is equally evident in Gray's second principle of incommensurability, which concerns itself with competing interpretations of a single value. As Gray affirms, 'every right is a bundle of potentially rival claims, because the interests that any right protects are many, and often at odds.'<sup>160</sup> Rival understandings of the same value are fundamental to the recent debate over the wearing of the burkha in liberal society. A primary argument in favour of the wearing of the burkha is that it reflects freedom of expression with respect to the individual's freedom to demonstrate allegiance to a particular religion and community. However, freedom of expression is also a central argument made by those who wish to *ban* the burkha, which is perceived to oppress the individual's self-expression. Both cultures honour freedom of expression, but one interprets it in the religious, communal sense, while the other perceives it from the standpoint of the individual. Although different people honour the same value, conflict still exists within the value because 'the meaning of [freedom] is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.'<sup>161</sup> Just as it is unfeasible to compare the varying perceptions of happiness, the same is true for freedom of expression since, in spite of belonging to the same genre, the diverse forms strands within that genre are incomparable. Thus, quite apart from standing at a distance from multicultural conflict, each individual liberal value itself is 'internally complex and even pluralistic.'<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>162</sup> Gray, *Liberalism*, p. 87.



Furthermore, liberal values also become enmeshed in incommensurable conflict when they collide with non-liberal principles. This is evident in the earlier example of the marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim whereby the non-Muslim must convert to Islam. As we have witnessed, the liberal value of individual freedom comes into conflict with the cultural value of allegiance to the religion and community. Since Islam honours religious and communal loyalty and liberalism upholds individual freedom, the two communities allege to different principles in the pursuit of their varying conceptions of the good. Resultantly, the relative worth of two values held by different cultures cannot be compared because they each require different criteria upon which to assess their worth. Once again then, liberal values are intertwined with multicultural conflict. Liberal universalism's insistence that its values stand apart from such conflict thus render it an oppressive theory by asserting individual freedom as the neutral, universal value to be honoured, resultantly converting those who prioritise allegiance to their community and religion as negative Others.

Since liberal values are equally enmeshed in conflict as non-liberal values, and since insistence otherwise evidently leads to the oppression of minorities, Gray demonstrates how we must resultantly refute liberal claims to neutrality. Firstly, he highlights Rawls' failure to recognise the controversy of liberal values, challenging whether the basic liberties, the difference principle and Rawls' treatment of abortion actually 'are uncontroversial applications or developments of an overlapping consensus.'<sup>163</sup> Berlin's three instances of value-conflict demonstrate the controversy over these principles, showing the inevitability of three types of clashes: *amongst* these values; *within* each value itself; and *between* liberal and cultural values. Where these clashes arise, they reflect competing notions of the good. Thus, contrary to Rawlsian

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<sup>163</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 75.

attempts at providing a neutral, universally acceptable plane, liberal values mirror a *liberal* conception of the good. Gray clarifies that 'any standpoint we adopt is that of a particular form of life and of the historic practices that constitute it.'<sup>164</sup> Consequently, liberal values are controversial because they seek to promote a particular conception of the good, but their neutrality claims not to do so. Raz thereby proposes that liberal universalism abandon its pretences of neutrality and acknowledge instead that its freedoms are rooted in the liberal conception of the good.<sup>165</sup>

Since liberal universalism fails to escape incommensurable value conflicts in society because it is not neutral in relation to the good, its claims to universal authority are inherently flawed. Berlin tells us that, influenced by Plato, Western philosophy has long since been based on three assumptions: firstly, that each significant question only has one correct answer; secondly, that there is a method of discovering these correct answers; and, finally, that all of these answers are compatible with one another.<sup>166</sup> This metaphysical view of the world assumes that, 'there are, out there in the world, real essences which it is our duty to discover and which are disposed to assist in our discovery.'<sup>167</sup> This is echoed in the philosophy of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, in which the neutrality and universality attached to justice and the basic liberties make them appear as correct answers; the original position and the veil of ignorance provide methods for discovering such answers; and Rawls' fixed hierarchy of rights implies compatibility between the goods in question. Gray asserts that subsequent Enlightenment thinking expanded on this by seeking to attach universal authority to human reason.<sup>168</sup> In spite of Rawls' claims that his work

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<sup>164</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 79.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>166</sup> Berlin, Isaiah, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, (London: John Murray, 1990), p. 28.

<sup>167</sup> Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 75.

<sup>168</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 64.

steers clear of the ambitions of the 'Enlightenment project of finding a philosophical secular doctrine, one founded on reason and yet comprehensive,'<sup>169</sup> his attempts at placing a universal stamp on human reason are evident in the previously discussed boundaries that he draws between the 'reasonable' and the 'unreasonable'. The universal authority he grants to the reasonableness of his principles is equally manifest through the employment of toleration, which is restricted to those that accept, and thus reaffirm, his values. Gray explains that, in this manner, 'toleration requires the liberal rational consensus to *endure* alternate values in the expectation that they will disappear.'<sup>170</sup> On this view diversity is not celebrated, but instead, something that 'we judge to be undesirable, false or at least inferior; our toleration expresses the conviction that, *despite* its badness, the object of toleration should be left alone.'<sup>171</sup> This is evident in Britain whereby the prohibition of gay marriage shows society's view of homosexuals as inferior citizens. Recently, the alternate creation of civil partnerships demonstrates attempts to endure, rather than celebrate sexual diversity, allowing it to exist *despite* its Otherness. This perspective of toleration, demonstrated by the discrepancy between homosexual and heterosexual rights, illustrates Rawls' perception of dominant, liberal values as superior to diverse, pluralistic ones, which 'accepts with regret the fact that there are many ways of life.'<sup>172</sup>

Yet it is this idea that liberal universalism has discovered a universal set of values, which is fundamentally flawed. As Berlin's value pluralism and Gray's three incommensurabilities demonstrate, each conflict of values – including those comprised of liberal values – has several potential answers depending on the actors involved; we lack a scale upon which to rank the values. Thus the metaphysical claim that there are universally discoverable answers is flawed

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<sup>169</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. Xx.

<sup>170</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 105.

<sup>171</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 18.

<sup>172</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 5.

because conflict amongst legitimate values shows that multiple correct answers can exist and, furthermore, that there is no scale on which to discover their relative worth. Thus, 'if we are to have as many types of perfection as there are types of culture, each with its deal constellation of virtues, then the very notion of the possibility of a single perfect society is logically incoherent.'<sup>173</sup> Hence, contrary to Rawls' theory - in which justice is the first value, followed by the basic liberties - there can be no one fixed hierarchy of values on which everyone can agree. Gray rejects the notion of 'perfection' as convergence on a single hierarchy of values, promoting instead a system of value pluralism, which requires multiple potential value outcomes in order to reflect the various interpretations of such 'perfection.' Gray resultantly promotes an alternative form of *modus vivendi* of toleration, which problematises the Rawlsian view in which liberal values constitute the superior mainstream upon which all other doctrines rely for their existence. Rather, he asserts that, 'toleration is valued as a condition of peace, and divergent ways of living are welcomed as marks of diversity in the good life.'<sup>174</sup> This view of toleration rejects the three Platonic assumptions that there is one correct answer to each question; that this answer is discoverable; and that the various answers to the different questions are compatible with one another. Gray insists instead that value conflicts often arise to which there are multiple solutions, and rather than viewing this as a sign of imperfection, it is a positive aspect of value pluralism that humans can flourish in a variety of manners.<sup>175</sup> This is significant to resisting the oppression that ensues from liberal universalism and its notion of toleration. If we extend Gray's toleration to the gay community, it is apparent that, rather than merely tolerating sexual diversity despite its 'badness', homosexuality would be celebrated as diversity, rather than perceived as a negative Other to be eliminated. It is apparent

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<sup>173</sup> Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 40.

<sup>174</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 105.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

then, that pluralist society requires a form of toleration that *celebrates* diverse lifestyles in order to overcome the exclusionary nature of liberal universalism and its subsequent tendency to aggravate social fragmentation.

As a result of post-liberalism's abandonment of universalism in favour of a plurality of answers, Moore informs us that 'the fact of value pluralism means that neither liberalism nor any substantive doctrine can claim a privileged place.'<sup>176</sup> Indeed, Gray purports that 'liberal cultures and liberal states must renounce any claim to universal authority, and learn to live in harmony with other, non-liberal cultures and polities.'<sup>177</sup> He states that the legitimacy of a regime should depend, not on its universal authority, but rather on its ability to satisfy the cultural needs of its citizens.<sup>178</sup> Importantly, Gray observes that it is often the case that liberalism is not the best system to fulfil this criterion. For example, the Ottoman Empire was perceived to be illiberal - since it failed to provide the individual freedom to grant citizens the right to leave communities - however it was an incredibly tolerant regime, enabling many different ways of life to flourish.<sup>179</sup> Thus with regards to toleration, it is evident that liberal regimes are not automatically the most effective in reflecting the needs of their citizens. It is thereby evident that the universalism attached to Rawls' liberal universalism is unfounded and 'represents an unwarranted liberal imperialism,'<sup>180</sup> which must be abandoned. Gray consequently perceives liberalism to be 'at best only one cultural form among the many that must seek coexistence through compromise.'<sup>181</sup> He explains that his post-liberal alternative 'continues the liberal search for peaceful coexistence; but it does so by giving up the belief that one way of

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<sup>176</sup> Moore, 'Pluralism, Relativism, and Liberalism,' p. 252.

<sup>177</sup> Gray, *Liberalism*, p. 96.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. X.

<sup>179</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 109.

<sup>180</sup> Galston, 'Value Pluralism and Liberal Political Theory,' p. 769.

<sup>181</sup> Crowder, George, 'Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism' in *Political Theory*, 35(2): 2007, p. 122

life, or a single type of regime, could be best for all.<sup>182</sup> Mouffe also supports calls for the abandonment of universality, asserting that Rawls' 'Justice as Fairness is only one among the possible interpretations of the political principles of equality and liberty...it must be seen as an intervention in an ongoing debate and cannot pretend to a privileged status with respect to other more or less radical interpretations.'<sup>183</sup> In this way, post-liberalism could overcome the oppressive nature of liberal universalism by abandoning universalism, and hence creating avenues for non-liberals to contest its principles.

It follows from Gray's rejection of universalism that the fixed value hierarchy that Rawls adheres to should also be abandoned. Raz explains this, refuting its assumption 'that there is a true value behind the ranking of options, and that the ranking is a kind of technique for measuring this value.'<sup>184</sup> Indeed, Berlin's value pluralism has already demonstrated the impossibility of Rawls' theory in ranking incommensurable values relative to one another. Thus, value conflict is conceptual rather than empirical,<sup>185</sup> and Rawls' numerical ordering of values is thereby inconsistent with the essence of conflict. Although Rawls' liberal universalism employs this fixed hierarchy of values, it claims to provide a practical account of pluralism by 'teasing out the presuppositions and implications of an actually existing overlapping consensus in society on important issues about liberty and justice.'<sup>186</sup> However, the very fact that Rawls constructs a theory to prescribe a fixed order of ranked principles signifies that decisions are made pre-politically 'by theoretical reasonings whose results are entrenched in constitutional law.'<sup>187</sup> This prevents his theory from adapting to the conflicts that arise within pluralist

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<sup>182</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 139.

<sup>183</sup> Mouffe, *Democracy, Power and the Political*, p.143.

<sup>184</sup> Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, p. 327.

<sup>185</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 55.

<sup>186</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 75.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

politics. As Mouffe explains, 'the liberal idea that the general interest results from the free play of private interests, and that a universal rational consensus could come out of free discussion, blinds liberalism to the phenomenon of the political.'<sup>188</sup> Resultantly, Rawls' attempts at distancing values from political life, means that the decisions made 'are not upshots of political discourse, or aspects of any real settlement or agreement achieved in actual political practice, but theorems, products of the peculiar species of theoretical reasoning.'<sup>189</sup> As a result of distancing value-conflict from politics then, the fixed hierarchy of values inherent in Rawls' liberal universalism suppresses politics in two ways.

Firstly, the values in question are ranked in terms of their relative worth without consideration of their changing contexts. Gray perceives this as the abandonment of 'the richness and depth of moral life, with all of its undecidable dilemmas, for the empty vistas of moral theory.'<sup>190</sup> Although Rawls acknowledges that 'even firmly held convictions change,'<sup>191</sup> his pre-political construction of a ranking order removes values from their context and hence, cannot adapt to the richness and depth of moral life. Raz's social dependence theory informs us of the emptiness of politics which ensues from ranking values prior to their political context, stating that 'there is no point to value without valuers. No point to beauty without people, or other valuers, who can appreciate it. No point to the value of love without lovers. No point in the value of truth without potential knowers.'<sup>192</sup> Gray observes that, 'outside of their contexts in social practices, no value can be attached to goods such as justice and friendship. They acquire their meaning and worth from

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<sup>188</sup> Mouffe, Chantal, *Democracy, Power and the Political* in Benhabib, Seyla, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 111

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>190</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 64.

<sup>191</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 8.

<sup>192</sup> Raz, *The Practice of Value*, p. 27.

the histories, needs and goals of human subjects and the ways of life to which they belong.<sup>193</sup> Theories such as Rawls' are thus only successful on a theoretical level as they fail to grant values sufficient content since they are extracted from the pluralist environment in which conflict occurs. Rorty concludes that such 'final vocabularies' are seen 'as poetic achievements rather than as fruits of diligent inquiry according to antecedently formulated criteria.'<sup>194</sup> How, for example, are we to suppose that justice necessarily triumphs freedom of consciousness if we are ignorant of the situation and people that require them?

Fixed value hierarchies also suppress politics by removing opportunities for legitimate alternative values. By granting a fixed order to its values, Rawls' liberal universalism leads to the 'entrenchment of these principles so that they are immune from the contingencies of political life.'<sup>195</sup> Thus, a theory that ranks justice and the basic liberties as the highest principles automatically ignores legitimate values that clash with these privileged values. Yet, if the theory were to consider such alternatives, in many cases the conflicting value may actually be more complimentary to a citizen's conception of the good than the prescribed value. To illustrate this, we shall now return to the clash between individual freedom and allegiance to the religion/community when a marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim requires the conversion of the non-Muslim. Perhaps the individual required to convert prioritises romantic love over individual freedom, and therefore respects the importance of allegiance to the Islamic religion and community. Since Rawls' liberal universalism attaches universal authority to individual freedom, and would thus view the decision to convert to Islam as Otherness, the individual becomes excluded and oppressed. Yet, since Gray's post-liberalism accepts

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<sup>193</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 43.

<sup>194</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 77

<sup>195</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 76.



that there are numerous outcomes to this value conflict, it overcomes the oppressive element of liberal universalism that furthers social fragmentation. Gray refutes Rawls' attempts at imposing an order of values on society, explaining that 'if there are goods (and evils) that are rationally incommensurable, then no political authority can have *good reason* to impose any particular combination of them on any of its citizens.'<sup>196</sup> Liberal universalist attempts at doing just that (through the prioritisation of justice and the basic liberties), fall back on a metaphysical view of politics, which perceives values as universal principles awaiting discovery. Pluralism thus renders the construction of fixed theories of rights both impossible and undesirable since they suppress politics by removing substance from the values they prescribe, and disregarding the potential for alternative legitimate values.

If, like Gray, we endorse Berlin's view that fixed value hierarchies are rendered unfeasible by the incommensurabilities and incompatibilities that arise, it thus follows that we must also reject the rationality that they employ as a means to conflict resolution. The search for rational solutions is to be abandoned on two premises: firstly, since pluralism consists of various conceptions of the good, there can be no single rational means of pursuing these, and secondly, rationalism is flawed since value-incommensurability renders it impossible to fix a rationally-decidable order of principles. Gray advocates instead Berlin's notion of radical choice, which asserts that Rawlsian rationalism exaggerates 'the power of reason to classify and arrange the moral universe, distorts and obscures a genuine rationalism, which recognizes the true limits of reason and makes room for agonizing moral choices that lack

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<sup>196</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p.p. 143-144.

rational justification.<sup>197</sup> The basis for this radical choice arises from Berlin's three notions of pluralism. The first notion rejects the idea of perfection (i.e., the discovery of a set of 'universal' values), perceiving it as a vacuous concept. The second notion abandons hierarchical theories of value, pointing to 'groundless and criterionless choice [as] the stuff of moral and political life.'<sup>198</sup> Finally, the third notion acknowledges that reason is helpless in choosing between incommensurable pluralist values.<sup>199</sup> As a consequence of this notion of pluralism, Berlin employs 'agonistic liberalism', which is based on the assumption that, rather than relying on any rational theory, value conflicts are to be resolved only through practice. Hence, on this view, the political takes primacy over the theoretical.<sup>200</sup>

The notion of resolving value conflict through practical and political means, as opposed to theoretical and rational ones, is rooted in Berlin's abandonment of perfection. Gray explicates that 'whereas choice presupposes genuine rivalry among conflicting goods, rational will points to one, and only one course of action, one form of life, for the individual.'<sup>201</sup> Thus Rawls' emphasis on rationality assumes that rational actors pursue a certain path of life, suppressing diversity for those who follow alternate routes. This echoes the aforementioned universalism of Rawls' theories in which rationality imagines a path of life that all human beings should strive toward through the discovery of universal values. Rejecting this notion, Berlin perceives the self as an entity that is invented through the choices we make.<sup>202</sup> Gray evidently endorses this view; as Paul Franco asserts, 'Gray celebrates Berlin...for his thoroughgoing rejection of rationalist monism and his radical assertion of the pluralism of

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<sup>197</sup> Riley, Jonathan, 'Interpreting Berlin's Liberalism' in *The American Political Science Review*, 95(2): 2001, p. 284.

<sup>198</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 71.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, p.p. 67-133.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

value.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, he abandons Rawls' understanding of the individual as a fixed being, acknowledging that choices constitute the individual who is 'a self-transforming species which invents a variety of natures for itself.'<sup>204</sup> This view thereby rejects the rational pursuit of ends that Rawls' liberal universalism presupposes, promoting instead the necessity of choice to the freedom of the individual. Since the individual's identity is constituted by his capacity for choice, and would thus be suppressed by restriction to a single rational path of life, 'the value of freedom derives from the limits of rational choice.'<sup>205</sup> Hence, by abandoning the rationality of *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, radical choice empowers individuals to employ their freedom in choosing amongst conflicting goods.

In accordance with his employment of radical choice, Gray consequently rejects the fixity of Rawls' liberal universalism in favour of contingent solutions. On this view, outcomes of political reasoning necessarily arise from circumstance since there is no impartial, universal standpoint. Each decision in society is made by an individual whose identity is intertwined with his attachments and situated within a context, thus it follows that the outcome is specific to the historical context of the actor involved.<sup>206</sup> This is not to say that agonistic liberalism never favours one value over another, or indeed one regime over another, it is moreover to affirm that the particular value or regime is favoured on a contingent basis. Gray thus rejects liberal universalism's static nature, as demonstrated by its fixed public-private distinction and the manner in which toleration reaffirms the liberal hegemony. Indeed, he challenges how 'any such consensus could have the fixity [Rawls] attributes to the principles of justice.'<sup>207</sup> He asserts that, even human rights

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<sup>203</sup> Franco, Paul, 'Oakeshott, Berlin and Liberalism' in *Political Theory*, 31(4): 2003), p. 493.

<sup>204</sup> Gray, *Berlin*, p. 10.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>206</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 79.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

are conventions that 'can be no once-and-for-all list of such rights, since the content of these evils alters with changes in human life. That is why it makes sense to revise or phase out some rights, and to create new rights.'<sup>208</sup> Human rights must adapt to the circumstances of society in order to fulfil the changing needs of citizens. For example, freedom of privacy did not exist in Europe until the early modern period since circumstance rendered it unimportant to people's lives, but when media communication increased, its implementation became necessary.<sup>209</sup> It is the ability to modify values according to the needs of citizens that ensures the political nature of society. Agonistic liberalism thus rejects the limitations that universalism places on such modifications, rejecting Rawls' fixed value hierarchy, usage of toleration to reaffirm its own hegemony and static public-private distinction in favour of a flexible politics that adapts to circumstance.

Gray's post-liberalism is a convincing proposal for a less universalistic, more political liberalism, which prioritises radical choice over rational. However, its emphasis on negative freedom reflects his failure to modify the public-private separation. Chapter one of this dissertation discussed how the fixed separation of these two realms is both oppressive to non-liberal citizens and damaging to multicultural politics. This section will seek to demonstrate how Gray's post-liberalism, based on the acknowledgment of incommensurability; the restoration of politics; the introduction of radical choice; and the insistence upon contingency, requires both positive freedom and the reworking of the public-private distinction.

Highly suspicious of positive freedom, or 'autonomy,' Berlin promotes instead the notion of negative freedom, a principle to which Gray is highly

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<sup>208</sup> Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 114.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, p. 114.

sympathetic. Gray asserts that in so doing, 'Berlin's liberalism is akin to the "political liberalism" of the later Rawls in refusing to ground liberal practice in a comprehensive ideal such as that of autonomy.'<sup>210</sup> This notion is explained through Berlin's belief that negative freedom is more effective at adapting to the diverse values and conceptions of the good within pluralist society.<sup>211</sup> Gray explicates that, for Berlin, negative liberty 'permits a far greater variety of forms of self-creation through choice-making.'<sup>212</sup> On the contrary, both Berlin and Gray resist positive freedom for fear that it curtails self-creation since it states that freedom is *only* valuable when used to pursue 'worthy' ends. For Berlin and Gray then, the notion of positive freedom is to be rejected on the premise that often, values honoured by one may be completely insignificant to another, which consequently problematises the definition of 'worthy' ends. Kwame Anthony Appiah supports this contention, asserting that employment of positive liberty in this way 'assign[s] us all to undertake a comprehensive assessment of norms and values,' thereby confusing 'the job description of the citizen with that of the moral theorist.'<sup>213</sup> Rather, Gray affirms that choice should be valued for choice itself, asserting that 'choice may be capricious or whimsical, perverse or unreasonable, quixotic or self-destructive: it remains choice, and, as such the source of the value of negative freedom.'<sup>214</sup> However, this is where I diverge with Gray in favour of the perfectionist liberalism of Joseph Raz. Contrary to Berlinian claims that positive freedom restricts self-creation, Raz believes it to be a necessary component to the 'vision of people controlling, to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives.'<sup>215</sup> He affirms that negative freedom alone is insufficient in ensuring the

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<sup>210</sup> Gray, Berlin, p. 35.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>212</sup> Gray, Berlin, p. 37.

<sup>213</sup> Appiah, Kwame Anthony quoted in Crowder, George, 'Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism' in *Political Theory*, 35(2): 2007, p. 129.

<sup>214</sup> Gray, Berlin, p. 29.

<sup>215</sup> Raz, Joseph, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), p. 369.

ability of citizens to make decisions. This is demonstrated in *Morality of Freedom* through the usage of an example of a slave who is coerced and manipulated into making a decision. As Raz illustrates, 'slaves are thought to lack autonomy even if they enjoy a range of options which, were they free, would have been deemed sufficient.'<sup>216</sup> This limitation of negative freedom is apparent in pluralist society when we consider the ability of a coerced or manipulated individual to exit a group. Although negative freedom prevents one citizen from removing the availability of another's choices, it is evidently insufficient in ensuring that these choices are always accessible. Thus, the negative liberty endorsed by Gray suppresses cultural diversity by failing to ensure the capacity for self-creation. Furthermore, Gray's support of negative freedom seems inconsistent with his rejection of liberal neutrality. It is paradoxical that he should acknowledge the conception of the good intrinsic to liberal values, yet he simultaneously resists positive freedom because it entails the imposition of a particular conception of the good. In so doing, his post-liberalism oppresses citizens in a similar manner to Rawlsian neutrality since it *falsely* claims not to impose a certain conception of the good. Alternatively, I wish to contend that positive freedom would resonate more with Gray's calls for the abandonment of liberal neutrality. It would also overcome the suppression of pluralism and enable the revival of politics.

Furthermore, Gray's empathy with Berlinian negative freedom highlights a fundamental gap in his agonistic liberalism. By emphasising the significance of negative freedom, Gray implicitly supports the liberal public-private distinction - an issue on which he remains silent - in which citizens are granted a private space to make decisions free from intervention. Yet the following paragraphs will demonstrate how Gray's failure to rework this divide poses a significant barrier to fulfilling the aims of his theory.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 377.

Primarily then, Gray uses Berlin's value pluralism to demonstrate the inevitability of three forms of incommensurability, exposing liberalism's entanglement in these value conflicts. Hence, since liberal values are neither impartial nor neutral and their endorsement depends on a certain conception of the good, we cannot separate a liberal's beliefs (derived from their conception of the good) from the liberal values they advocate. Quite contrary to this, Rawls' public-private separation 'presupposes belief to be neatly separable from ritual practice.'<sup>217</sup> Yet Gray himself shows that this is not the case, arguing that value conflicts arise because varying conceptions of the good lead to allegiance to different values. David Owen explains his contention that he, like Gray, rejects the separation of the political and personal components of an individual, stating that 'one's substantive conception of the good is what is revealed in the ordered set of values which one argues for in the political arena.'<sup>218</sup> Resultantly, 'the political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition.'<sup>219</sup> Therefore if Gray's post-liberalism is to be consistent with the opinion that a person's values are constituted by their conception of the good, the fixed separation between the public and private spheres must be reworked.

Not only does the Rawlsian division of the public and the political appear inconsistent with Gray's perspective of the liberal conception of the good, it also contradicts his endorsement of incommensurability as a healthy component of pluralist society. Gray claims to perceive incommensurability, of

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<sup>217</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 56.

<sup>218</sup> Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, p. 161.

<sup>219</sup> Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, p. 3.

which liberal values are not exempt, as an example of the flourishing of different ways of life in pluralist society. However, if we are to have a set public space governed by liberal values, isolated from alternative beliefs, how can the concerns of minority groups ever triumph? Chapter one sought to illustrate the difficulty inherent in this by demonstrating the barrier created by the public-private divide concerning the extension of basic liberties to women. Surely, this form of liberalism 'undermines the agonistic character of public culture...through the form of the public/private distinction which it institutes.'<sup>220</sup> True diversity can only occur if the political arena is not solely restricted to liberal assumptions. If other legitimate beliefs are to be ignored, then assimilation to liberal norms is required in the public arena, and thus politics is suppressed. The post-liberalism of Gray and Berlin acknowledges the often incommensurable diversity of pluralist citizens, endorsing a less theoretical, more political version of politics. However, they 'privatise' perspectivism by tying it to a liberal distinction between public and private spheres, confining the plural perspectives on the good to the private domain.<sup>221</sup> Consequently post-liberalism depoliticises the public realm by requiring conflicting perspectives to be resolved privately. William Connolly insists upon the blurring of the public and private distinction in accordance with post-liberal calls for the restoration of politics in society. Condemning liberal universalist attempts at distancing liberal values from conflict, Connolly purports that 'the idea is not to rise above faith, but to forge a positive ethos of public engagement between alternative faiths.'<sup>222</sup> Since Gray's post-liberalism acknowledges the impossibility of separating liberal values from pluralist conflict, and resultantly rejects its claims to neutrality, then it is evident that Gray also endorses Connolly's calls for the engagement between faiths. However, Connolly argues that this necessitates the reconsideration of

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<sup>220</sup> Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, p. 133.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147.

<sup>222</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 48.



the public-private distinction. He explains that if post-liberalism were to merge the public and private divide, it would be more effective in encouraging pluralism. He clarifies that in so doing, post-liberalism would see how faiths are expressed in public, and thus be better equipped at mediating between conflicting conceptions of the good.<sup>223</sup> Hence, Gray's post-liberalism, which calls for more political reasoning, necessitates the modification of the public-private separation in order to prevent the suppression of non-liberal beliefs, and instead encourage pluralism to thrive.

Intertwined with promoting the political over the legal, Gray's post-liberalism also follows Berlin's agonistic liberalism in favouring radical choice over rational. However, once again, the theory's weakness is in its silence over the public-private distinction. Within a public sphere governed by liberal values that limits all other values, how can radical choice really be achieved? Connolly highlights the fragmentary element of the public-private separation, requiring minority citizens 'to express religious belief in the private realm and to participate as abstract citizens in the public. This innocent and tolerant-sounding definition quietly elevates modern Christians into the center...and shuffles many Muslims [and other minorities] into a minority.'<sup>224</sup> Hence, Gray's respect for diversity is flawed through its failure to modify the affirmation and reaffirmation of liberal values in the public sphere whereby alternative doctrines are relegated to the private realm. In the same way that freedom is oppressed (as discussed in section one), radical choice too, is in practice, oppressed by the prohibition of non-liberal alternatives into the public arena.

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p.p. 48-49.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

Since post-liberalism's public-private divide still requires citizens to privilege liberal principles in the public realm, Gray's *modus vivendi* of toleration equally fails to allow citizens the genuine capacity to pursue freely their personal conceptions of the good. This contradicts Gray's radical choice in which conflict resolutions occur contextually, free of a set of fixed values. However, radical choice falls prey to Rawls' fixed hierarchy of values since the fixed public-private distinction requires the pursuit of the liberal conception of the good. Resultantly, if we are to provide citizens with extensive radical choice then we must do more than simply tolerate alternate values as inferior principles to stay in the private realm. Instead, legitimate radical choice requires that alternative life forms should be considered in public decision making which necessitates the blurring of the public-private division. If Gray's post-liberalism continues liberal universalism's tradition of dictating which values govern the public sphere then it will fall back on rationalism.

Finally, Gray's post-liberalism rejects the possibility of granting universal authority to liberalism, instead insisting upon its contingency. However, once again, it is the liberal distinction between the public and private that acts as an obstacle to this contingency. Since liberal principles must be adhered to within the public sphere, liberal universalism and post-liberalism derive their power from the fact that private doctrines will only be tolerated on the condition that they accept liberal principles. In this sense, the public-private separation renders liberal values incontestable. Connolly alerts us to the difficulty here, stressing the importance of contestation. He emphasises its ability to 'unsettle such naturalized settlements, [disturb] conventional judgments of abnormality and expos[e] something of the contingent and power-laden character of these settlements.'<sup>225</sup> A reworking of the public-private distinction would allow competing notions of the good to enter into the

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<sup>225</sup>Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 98.

public realm and hence permit contestation. On Connolly's view, this would subsequently allow for the challenging of the liberal hegemony. This is entirely consistent with Gray's portrayal of liberalism, in which he rejects the conception of it as a universal doctrine, but moreover perceives it as a contingency to be challenged. Gray has even acknowledged the:

'[There is an evident] tension in the agonistic liberalisms of Berlin and Raz, in so far as they aim to give reasons for according a universal or general priority over other political goods to their differing conceptions of freedom. Berlin's claim that collective well-being, equality and liberty, for example are irreducible and incommensurable values is not easily reconciled with the claim he sometimes also makes that freedom – in his preferred conception of negative liberty – is to be accorded a general, though never absolute priority over other ultimate values.'<sup>226</sup>

Therefore, were the public-private distinction to be reworked in favour of a more contingent application of these principles, Gray's concerns about the universality of these principles would be addressed. Even if Berlin's negative liberty, for instance, were currently prioritised, the public presence of rival conceptions of the good would enable this to be challenged, ensuring its contingency and preventing it from becoming oppressive. Additionally, Connolly describes the public arena not only as a forum for the contestation of existing values, but also as a catalyst for new possibilities which 'are created by identifying traces in the other of the sensibility one identifies in oneself and

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<sup>226</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, p. 141.

locating in the self elements of the sensibility attributed to the other.<sup>227</sup> Since Gray endorses the concept of contingency whereby regimes and their values evolve alongside society, it follows that he would also endorse the potential for new possibilities to arise. However, in maintaining the public and private spheres, Gray's post-liberalism restricts such evolution by preventing citizens from identifying with others through the contestation of their differences. As a result, contingency - both in challenging current ideas and forming new ones - is constrained by the fixed division of the public and private spheres.

Consequently, it seems that Gray's post-liberal view of the inevitability of value incommensurability; the restoration of politics and radical choices; and the necessity of contingency, are paradoxical to the fixed public-private separation. In order to allow the pursuit of various conceptions of the good; restore politics; overcome the suppression of non-liberals; and ensure the contingent nature of liberalism, it is imperative that Gray's post-liberalism rethinks the public-private divide.

In sum then, Gray's post-liberalism is an admirable move away from liberal universalism. Its inclusion of liberalism in value incommensurability, and its resultant abandonment of attempting to provide a neutral or universally acceptable set of values, offers us a much less oppressive and fragmentary version of liberalism. Gray insists on the desertion of a fixed value hierarchy that relates to a rational path of life, in favour of a more political and radical engagement. This is significant to the restoration of pluralism into society by reinstating substance into values and by encouraging, rather than oppressing, a multitude of outcomes. Furthermore, the contingency to which Gray attributes key importance alleviates oppression by ensuring the contestability

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<sup>227</sup> Connolly, William, E, 'Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault' in *Political Theory*, 21(3): 1993, p. 382.

of existing values. Yet, the paradox in Gray's post-liberalism is his endorsement of negative freedom and his failure to rework the public-private separation. Gray's acknowledgment of the incommensurabilities within liberalism and his resultant perception of it as a conception of the good, render a fixed public-private distinction contradictory. A public-private distinction whereby belief is neatly separable from politics is inconsistent with Gray's idea of incommensurability, which views the resolution of value decisions to resonate with belief in a particular conception of the good. Consequently, if his post-liberalism is to assert that value-conflicts are resolved according to differing notions of the good, then he must reconsider the public-private separation. His calls for a more political form of reasoning are similarly restricted by the relegation of beliefs to the private sphere and the consequent suppression of pluralism to the non-political realm. Gray's post-liberalism can only be consistent with his demands for the restoration of politics if he reworks the public-private distinction. Likewise, his emphasis on radical choice cannot be practiced within the separate public realm. Just as the individual freedom endorsed by liberal universalism is restrictive because it limits its extension to liberals, radical choice cannot truly promote self-mastery if decision making must adhere to liberal values. Radical choice can only be *radical* if people are encouraged to bring their conceptions of the good into the public sphere. Finally, Gray's favouring of contingency over universality is flawed because of the fixed public-private distinction. It is impossible to contest the current dominant principles if we are to contest those within a sphere restricted to those very principles. Therefore, it is quintessential to Gray's contingency that other values and principles are allowed into the public sphere through the renegotiation of the public-private distinction. Consequently then, Gray's post-liberalism provides numerous advances which offer a less oppressive, less exclusionary and therefore less fragmentary system, however for this to be effective, the public-private

separation must be modified. The next chapter will draw on the agonism of William Connolly in order to consider how the public-private separation could be reconsidered.

### ***Chapter Three***

#### ***The Agonism of William E. Connolly***

*'To cross that threshold is to shake up something in the established world. It is to propel a fork in political time, throwing a wrench into the established code of obligation, goodness, identity, justice, right, or legitimacy.'*

(William E. Connolly, 2010)

Focusing on the work of John Gray, the second chapter demonstrated how post-liberal developments respond to the difficulties that arise within liberal universalism. Post-liberalism requires both radical choice and contingency of decision-making, refuting liberal universalist attempts at ranking the relative worth of competing values. Gray asserts that such value-conflict is inevitable within the context of a pluralist society, and that, contrary to claims of neutrality and universality, liberal universalism fails to stand apart from this conflict. I concluded that, although post-liberal aspirations toward radical choice and contingent decision-making provide important recommendations for prevailing over oppression and exclusion, the public-private divide requires renegotiation in order for these to be fulfilled. In the field of agonism, such renegotiation is perceived to be vital to overcoming oppression and exclusion in both its acknowledgement of deep pluralism, and the manner in which it allows for the radical choice and contingency endorsed by post-liberal thinkers.

This chapter will focus on the work of a key agonist thinker, William Connolly in an attempt to demonstrate that agonism's public-private renegotiation could enhance the advancements of post-liberalism. Firstly, I will outline Connolly's rejection of the conventional notion of pluralism, which restricts diversity to the norms and assumptions of the status quo. This is important to my project as it demonstrates how Rawls' interpretation of pluralism converts diversity into Otherness, suppressing pluralism and intensifying conflict and social fragmentation. Connolly's notion of identity will subsequently be employed to



demonstrate how diverse identities in society are relational, thereby demonstrating the necessary interdependence of citizens. The inevitability of this intertwining of identities is vital in addressing the findings of the previous post-liberalism chapter in which the fixed public-private separation was deemed as both impossible and undesirable. I will thus discuss Connolly's notions of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness, demonstrating how respect and self-modification are employed to allow the contestation of divergent views. This will illustrate how agonism seeks to overcome the oppressive nature of liberal universalism whereby comprehensive doctrines are relegated to the private sphere. I will then consider Connolly's acknowledgement of the risk involved in allowing conflicting beliefs and faiths to contest one another in the public realm, defending his agonism against charges of cultural relativism. Finally, I will assert that the promotion of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness through deep pluralism and interdependent identities, render Connolly's ethos a noble attempt at replacing oppression and exclusion with radical politics of contingency. However, I will contend that Connolly's ethos is overly optimistic in the context of rife fundamentalist conflict, such as that of the September 11th hijackers. It will thus be suggested that his theory could be greatly enhanced by combining his proposal of an ethos of generosity with complementary institutions and a motivational narrative.

I begin then, by exploring Connolly's critique of the conventional pluralism typically employed by liberalism and his alternative proposal for a deep-pluralism. He claims that the boundaries of conventional pluralism restrict diversity to a given framework by imposing two limitations. First, the physical boundaries limit pluralism to the state,<sup>228</sup> and subsequently, the moral boundaries limit pluralism to the existing norms of society. Such norms are

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<sup>228</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. xiii.

restricted by a whole set of assumptions about gender difference, rights, economy, justice, reason, identity and nature, amongst others.<sup>229</sup> The assumptions and norms that create and uphold this boundary are highly evident in pluralist British society, as demonstrated by the rights granted to same-sex couples. As previously mentioned, the recent introduction of the civil partnership allows gay couples similar rights and responsibilities as those granted to heterosexual couples through marriage, yet same-sex marriage remains illegal. This is a clear example of how conventional pluralism embraces diversity (through the legalisation of civil partnerships and thus the extension of partnership rights to same-sex couples), but ensures that this operates *within* the realms of the current status quo (in spite of granting the same legal consequences, a civil partnership must remain a separate entity from marriage). This parallels Gray's critique of liberal toleration whereby minorities are tolerated *in spite* of their differences, and are only tolerated on the condition that they adhere to and reaffirm liberal principles. Connolly thus highlights the limited nature of such pluralism, asserting that these narrow boundaries of pluralism set 'stringent limits of reasonableness within which new claims to diversification are judged.'<sup>230</sup> This reminds us of chapter one in which Rawls' usage of the 'rational' and the 'reasonable' attaches a universalistic superiority to liberal values, restricting society to what the liberal hegemony perceives to be reasonable. Instead of providing a diverse society then, conventional pluralism restricts variety to those whose paths of life are compatible with liberalism, oppressing difference by converting it into Otherness. Connolly highlights how attempts at oppressing alternate faiths can increase conflict and violence, describing conventional pluralism as 'haunted by the ghosts it seeks to exorcise.'<sup>231</sup> Connolly thereby perceives one aspect of liberal oppression and exclusion to arise from the narrow walls

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. xiv.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, p. xiv.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. xii.

of norms and assumptions to which pluralism is confined. He calls, instead, for a 'deeper' pluralism, which accounts for faiths that operate outside of the status quo. This deep pluralism requires that 'democracy must not be governed too tightly by a prior set of moral principles, constitutional rules, corporate dictates, or normative codes.'<sup>232</sup> This notion consequently supports Gray's critique of Rawls' fixed value hierarchy in which he rejects rational choice in favour of radical choice and contingency. Yet Connolly's interpretation of deep pluralism diverges from Gray's in its renegotiation of the fixity of the public-private divide. He asserts that deep pluralism requires minorities to bring dimensions of their faith into the public arena in order to 'reinstate the link between practice and belief that has been artificially severed by secularism.'<sup>233</sup> This is contrary to Rawls' attempts at relegating faith to the private sphere in an aspiration toward reducing pluralist conflict. Connolly's deep pluralism thus seeks to overcome the oppression of liberal universalism by challenging the narrowness of its rules and norms, and by encouraging minorities to bring their faiths into the public realm. This enables his deep pluralism to overcome the exclusion that aggravates social fragmentation and conflict.

Just as conventional pluralism converts difference into Otherness by restricting diversity to the realm of liberal reason, individual faiths also have the potential to suppress pluralism and further fragment society through 'fundamentalism' or 'madness in faith.'<sup>234</sup> Connolly describes fundamentalism as the grounding of a belief in an absolute authority, whereby those that diverge from this belief is converted into a negative Other:

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<sup>232</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, p. 15.

<sup>233</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 64.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

'[Fundamentalism is] an overweening drive to assert: "What I am (believe, demand, pray, do) is what morality (God, nature, reason, science) itself requires; and anything (person, creed, nation, movement) deviating from these exclusive imperatives is an other to be converted or conquered or both".'<sup>235</sup>

For instance, the terrorists involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks were constituted of a group of individuals who perceived their identity as Islamic extremists to be what Allah and the Quran require, interpreting the decline of faith in the West as an immorality, requiring elimination of the 'infidel.' Connolly explains that this threat of fundamentalism arises when one faith perceives the identity of another as a danger to its expression, or even existence. This threat arises as a result of the interdependence of identities in which each individual is defined by the very element of his identity that distinguishes him from others.<sup>236</sup> Subsequently, when the different values intrinsic to these identities conflict with one another, identity 'converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.'<sup>237</sup> Returning to the above example, an Islamic extremist may perceive Western atheism as a threat to the significance of Islamic cultural and communal values. Connolly explains that 'the publication of those alternative faiths, needed for the specification of yours, can also threaten self-confidence that your faith expresses the essence of being. *It is inside this double constitution of faith itself that the problem of evil within faith is insinuated.*'<sup>238</sup> The drive to simultaneously reassert one's own faith as an absolute, whilst transforming diversity into a negative Other, leads to resentment and the desire to

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<sup>235</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 107.

<sup>236</sup> Connolly, William E, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 64.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>238</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 27.

eradicate difference. This tendency to negate difference endangers pluralist society with an increased threat of conflict and social fragmentation.

Connolly explains that such 'madness in faith'<sup>239</sup> does not just arise from the threat that the Other poses to one's own identity. This resentment also evolves when a faith holds a set of values that are odds with those that society claim to be universal.<sup>240</sup> Just as an Islamic extremist fails to challenge his own interpretation of divinity, nature and sin when considering atheism, universalistic theories, such as Rawls', equally fail to contest their own interpretations of justice, toleration and individual freedom. This can resultantly cause resentment from sectors of society who do not agree that such liberal values are universal. Connolly affirms that the relegation of faith to the private sphere can cause social fragmentation in this way, since 'secularists themselves very often have inordinate faith in the self-sufficiency of the public procedures they endorse.'<sup>241</sup> Hence, Rawls' aspirations of providing a neutral public sphere aside from religious conflict can actually increase fundamentalist fervour by remaining ignorant to the contestability of his own liberal ideals, thereby excluding and marginalising minorities. Connolly explains this further with reference to both the legal and rational components of *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*. He asserts that they 'silently take [their] own fundamental identity to be the source that must guide moral life in general...[and] insist that [their] identity is anchored in an intrinsic Purpose or Law or potential consensus that can be known to be true.'<sup>242</sup> Resultantly, by preventing the contestation of its values by grounding them in laws and consensuses, Rawls' liberal universalism has the potential to increase fundamentalism, aggravating minorities who feel excluded and marginalised. Connolly thus echoes Gray's belief that liberal universalist

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>242</sup> Connolly, 'Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault,' p. 368.

attempts at constructing laws and consensuses in order to regulate values can actually intensify fundamentalist conflict rather than mediating it. His agonism thereby supports Gray's post-liberal demands for a contingent decision-making procedure in which each doctrine acknowledges the contestable nature of its conception of the good, affirming contingent, radical choice over incontestable laws or consensuses.

Connolly perceives contestability to be necessary to overcoming the oppression and social fragmentation of liberal universalism in two ways. Primarily, when one acknowledges the contestability of his own doctrine, the threat that this identity poses to the identity of another is significantly reduced. Thus if Rawls' liberal universalism were to follow post-liberal calls for the abandonment of neutrality and universality then it would reduce the threat it poses to the identity of non-liberals. Additionally, when society acknowledges the contestability of its dominant values and beliefs (such as those endorsed by Rawls' liberal universalism), less oppression is inflicted on those that do not share such ideals. Connolly arrives at these two conclusions from the influence that he draws from the works of both Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In *Man and His Doubles*, Foucault emphasises the relational and collective element of identity, whereby each identity in society is necessarily interconnected with conflicting others. He illustrates this with the example of the painting of Las Meninas in which 'all the interior lines of the painting, and above all those that come from the central reflection, point towards the very thing that is represented, but absent.'<sup>243</sup> Thus, by demonstrating the painting's ability to convey the meaning of one absent idea through related ideas, Foucault shows how concepts are interconnected, in which we can enrich our knowledge of one concept by understanding another.

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<sup>243</sup> Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 335.

Connolly emphasises the necessity of such relationality and collectivity, providing us with an example of an instance in which one's understanding of a value requires access to other related concepts:

'If a person did not understand the concept of honesty, he might, if he wanted money, simply take it from a purse left open. We could not correctly say that he acted dishonestly... For the concepts of honesty, advice, and politeness must be available to the agents themselves before they can be said to act in these ways. If our simple person came later to understand the concept of honesty, he would now confront *decisions* not available to him before.'<sup>244</sup>

Thus, as both Foucault and Connolly's example suggest, it is the very existence of alternate concepts that renders one concept meaningful. Derrida asserts that '*différance* is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each so-called "present" element...is related to something other than itself.'<sup>245</sup> Hence, the significance of one identity is derived from the relation it has to other identities. Contrary to Rawls' attempts at isolating the liberal public sphere from the non-liberal private sphere, Connolly draws on Derridean *différance* to falsify the possibility that concepts can exist in a vacuum. He affirms that 'clarification of the concept of politics thereby involves the elaboration of the broader conceptual system within which it is implicated.'<sup>246</sup> Foucault explains that the necessary relationality and collectivity of identity is not restricted to terms that complement one another, but also extends to those that conflict with one another. He illustrates this

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<sup>244</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, p.p. 36-37.

<sup>245</sup> Derrida, Jacques (translated by Allison, David B), *Speech and Phenomena and other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1973), p. 142.

<sup>246</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, p. 14.

with the example of nature and human nature, which he deems to be opposites:

'Despite this opposition, however, or rather, through it, we see the positive relation of nature to human nature beginning to take shape. They act, in fact, upon identical elements...both reveal against the background of an uninterrupted fabric the possibility of a general analysis which makes possible the distribution of isolable identities and visible differences over a tabulated space and in an ordered sequence. But they cannot succeed in doing this without each other, and it is there that the communication between them occurs.'<sup>247</sup>

Connolly too, extends the relational and collective nature of identity to notions that conflict, which is important since, as Gray articulates, pluralist society is rife with conflicting identities that may be incommensurable and/or incompatible with one another. Indeed, it is the clash of these identities that causes the very fundamentalist conflict that Rawls, Gray and Connolly seek to mediate. Connolly affirms that his personal identity as a white, male, American, sports fan, 'is further specified by comparison to a variety of thing I am not.'<sup>248</sup> This is evident if we turn to pluralist society since, for instance, pro-choice abortion campaigners are defined by the values and beliefs that distinguish them from pro-life campaigners; homosexuals from the manner in which their relations diverge from those of heterosexuals; and religious groups from the elements of alternate faiths that they reject.

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<sup>247</sup> Foucault, p. 337.

<sup>248</sup> Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p. xiv.



Connolly concludes that since every identity is reliant upon the existence of others, 'no positive identity can be judged final in a world where identities are organized through the differences they regulate.'<sup>249</sup> On the contrary, to pursue a single identity whilst eliminating all alternatives is to 'be false to difference.'<sup>250</sup> Rawls' liberal universalist doctrine - which maintains the dominance of its own identity by rendering itself incontestable, and by eliminating difference from the public sphere - thereby oppresses society in two ways. Primarily, since the liberal identity is incomplete when isolated from the different identities of alternate doctrines, the values of Rawls' liberal public sphere lack substance, oppressing politics. Additionally, the relegation of difference to the private sphere suppresses diversity and pluralism. Thus Connolly explains that, contrary to the liberal hegemony intrinsic to Rawls' public sphere, one must forgo the pursuit of a single identity in order to be true to difference.<sup>251</sup> In so doing, Connolly emphasises the importance of publicly engaging with those alternate others to whom we are necessarily interlinked. He explains that by focusing on our differences, politics acknowledges the 'indispensability of identity to life, disturbs the dogmatization of identity, and folds care for the protean diversity of human life into the strife and interdependence of identity\ difference.'<sup>252</sup> Thus, it is through such engagement that we are able to overcome the liberal universalist hegemony; revive substance to public values; and encourage diversity.

Connolly's interpretation of identity, in which each one necessarily engages with alternative others, demonstrates a different definition of identity to those reflected in both Rawls' and Gray's public-private distinctions. According to Connolly's agonistic perception of identity 'it is impossible to become detached

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<sup>249</sup> Connolly, William E, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 58.

<sup>250</sup> Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p. 67.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. x.

entirely from identities coursing through us; for we float, swim, and sink in the pool of normality and abnormality in which we are set.<sup>253</sup> This standpoint is quite contrary to the theories of both Rawls and Gray, which require each citizen to detach himself from his private attachments before entering the public sphere. This static public-private distinction supports the assumption in the first chapter in which one's attachments are not essential to their existence, making it possible to dress oneself in one's attachments, removing them when necessary.<sup>254</sup> Connolly's agonism alternatively perceives attachments as necessary components in constituting the identity of both the individual and his relational other. Thus, it follows that on Connolly's view of identity, a non-liberal citizen cannot exist in isolation from his beliefs, and a liberal citizen cannot exist without his relational Other. As Connolly asserts, this renders impossible the liberal relegation of faith to the private sphere because 'if difference requires identity and identity requires difference, then politics, in some sense of that protean word, pervades social life.'<sup>255</sup> Since identity is relational and interdependent, it is thereby evident that the beliefs of citizens cannot exist in isolation to one another and the fixed public-private divide between liberal and non-liberal attachments must be reworked.

Not only is it impossible, in Connolly's view, to ban identity/difference relations from the public sphere of the political, it is also undesirable for two reasons. This prohibition of non-liberal values in Rawls' public sphere primarily creates a barrier to Gray's radical choice and contingency, and subsequently, displays a public consensus which is biased in favour of the current dominant hegemony. As a result of the fixed public-private distinction, hegemonic groups such as liberals, lend 'legitimacy to their initiatives and veto power while diminishing it for groups which might otherwise seek to challenge

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<sup>253</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 98.

<sup>254</sup> Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, p. 135.

<sup>255</sup> Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p. ix.

prevailing practices.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, Connolly informs us that pluralism does not frequently triumph when cases of difference arise in the public sphere.<sup>257</sup> Evidently then, the prevalence of pluralism through radical choice is often restricted, frequently falling prey instead to the rational choice of the current hegemony. In addition to limiting radical choice, the separate public sphere also curtails the contingency that Gray calls for. By prioritising dominant values and beliefs, the public-private distinction 'misrecognizes new possibilities of diversification by freezing moral standards of judgment condensed from past political struggles.'<sup>258</sup> In order to overcome the oppression invoked by Rawls' liberal universalism then, 'the connections between personal and collective identity must be engaged overtly and politically if they are not to spawn a collective politics that unconsciously represses difference in the name of neutrality.'<sup>259</sup> Hence, it is in the public engagement of belief systems that oppression is overcome by challenging the current hegemony and reviving politics through emphasising the necessity of difference. His agonism thus reworks the public-private divide to ensure that it consists of 'a preliminary readiness to negotiate with presumptive generosity and forbearance in those numerous situations where recourse to the porous rules of commonality across faiths, public procedure, reason, or deliberation are insufficient to the issue at hand.'<sup>260</sup>

Connolly's definition of identity thereby suggests that pluralist society requires both acknowledgment of the contestability of conflicting doctrines and the renegotiation of the public-private separation. In renegotiating the public-private divide to ensure contestability, Connolly firstly develops the notion of Agonistic Respect in which 'we opponents can become bonded together,

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<sup>256</sup> Connolly, *The Bias of Pluralism*, p. 15.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>258</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. xiv.

<sup>259</sup> Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p. 161.

<sup>260</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 64.

partially and contingently, through an enhanced experience of the contestability of the problematic each pursues most fervently.<sup>261</sup> Connolly's notion of agonistic respect draws on a post-Nietzschean ethical sensibility. This sensibility aspires initially, to expose the pretence by which dominant hegemonies secure their self-certainty; secondly, to challenge the hegemonic moralities; thirdly, to create a 'pathos of distance' in which the contestability of each position is acknowledged; and finally, to contest those that suppress the constructed, contingent, relational nature of identity.<sup>262</sup> Fundamental to my project is Connolly's employment of the pathos of distance which asserts that participation in the public arena requires each identity to acknowledge the contestability of its own ideals. Connolly affirms that whilst the individual continues to affirm his beliefs, it is necessary to 'come to terms viscerally and positively with the extent to which it must appear profoundly *contestable* to others inducted into different practices, exposed to different events, and pulled by different calls to loyalty.'<sup>263</sup> Connolly explains that contestability 'inserts relational modesty into its ritual practices to amplify one side of its own faith – the injunction to practice hospitality toward other faiths coexisting with it – and to curtail pressures within it to repress and marginalize other faiths.'<sup>264</sup> Connolly's focus on contestability thus aspires to reduce the repression and marginalisation that fundamentalism aggravates by claiming one belief as superior and negating all alternatives as a result. In addition to reducing the effects of fundamentalism, the contestability intrinsic to agonistic respect also seeks to resist the violence that can arise when values are imposed under the guise of universalism. When liberal universalism presents individual freedom, for instance, as neutral and universal, social fragmentation is aggravated by oppressing and excluding those who give precedence to alternate values. Yet, when liberalism accepts the contestability of individual

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<sup>261</sup> Connolly, 'Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault, p. 382.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 372.

<sup>263</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 32.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

freedom, citizens honouring alternate values are encouraged to challenge it, thereby including them in engagement, resultantly preventing the oppressive nature of liberal universalist marginalisation. Thus it is evident that Connolly's notion of contestability draws on Gray's demands for liberal universalism to abandon its claims to neutrality and universality. However, agonism builds on these post-liberal demands by ensuring that liberal values are contested politically in public engagement. Connolly illustrates that through contestability, 'you sacrifice the demand for the unquestioned hegemony of your faith to curtail the occasions when its very defense calls upon you to impose otherwise unnecessary violence or suffering on others.'<sup>265</sup> The significance of this contestability is manifest in the historical dominance of heterosexual relationships that allowed violence and suffering to be inflicted on homosexuals in the name of universalism. It was only when the superior status of heterosexuals became contestable that violence and suffering was reduced. Therefore, by acknowledging the contestability of one's own beliefs in this way, public contestation overcomes the repression, marginalisation, and violence that is justified by granting an incontestable universal status to values. It is thereby evident how the contestability and contingency endorsed in Connolly's decision-making can overcome the oppressive, exclusionary nature of Rawls' neutral and universal consensuses.

In addition to his aim of preventing repression and violence, Connolly aspires, through agonistic respect, to cultivate positive relationships between contending identities. This idea is derived from Foucault's notion of analytic finitude, which 'is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same.'<sup>266</sup> Connolly refers to this concept as imperative to the negotiation of 'oblique *connections* across multiple lines of

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>266</sup> Foucault, p. 370.

difference, negotiating agonistic respect between constituencies who embrace different final faiths and do not comprehend each other all that well.<sup>267</sup> It is thus by acknowledging the contestability of our beliefs – and, consequently, forming connections with the Other – that violent conflicts can be transformed into positive, diverse relationships. Connolly explains that this connection is formed by employing the notion of contestability, allowing the individual to demonstrate his own doubts and uncertainties in his position to the Other. Connolly asserts that citizens ‘connect positively through reciprocal confession that those in each group confront doubts, forgetfulness, or uncertainties in themselves that may invert those confronted by others.’<sup>268</sup> In this manner, an affinity is formed with the Other. For example, it has previously been affirmed that, frequently, both those endorsing the wearing of the burkha and those favouring its prohibition all advocate freedom of expression, but they perceive it from divergent standpoints; respectively that of the religious community and that of the individual. Perhaps if the opposing groups were to employ agonistic respect and demonstrate awareness of the contestability of their interpretation of freedom of expression, then the two sides could overcome their resentment toward one another. As Connolly states, ‘they can evolve into reciprocal commitment to inject generosity and forbearance into public negotiations between parties who reciprocally acknowledge that the deepest wellsprings of human inspiration are to date susceptible to multiple interpretations.’<sup>269</sup> This generosity and forbearance, from the standpoint of Connolly’s agonism, is constituted by accepting the contestability of one’s own identity in favour of offering the other ‘opacity.’<sup>270</sup> It is also significant that, for Connolly, acknowledgement of contestability does not lead to a decline in one’s loyalty toward it. So, if those advocating the prohibition of the burkha were to acknowledge the contestability of their individual interpretation of

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<sup>267</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 124.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

freedom of expression, they would in no way be required to adapt their interpretation to the communal alternative. Moreover, as Connolly explains, 'there is no contradiction in first affirming the essential contestability of a concept and then making the strongest case available for one of the positions within that range. That's politics.'<sup>271</sup>

In reference to the relationship between agonistic respect and liberal toleration, Connolly asserts that they 'are kissing cousins, but they are not equivalent.'<sup>272</sup> Connolly echoes Gray's critique of liberal toleration as a tool by which minorities are tolerated as inferior others who must adhere to liberal norms, thereby reasserting the liberal hegemony. He demonstrates the power relations inherent in such toleration, stating that 'liberal tolerance is bestowed upon private minorities by a putative majority occupying the authoritative, public center... People seldom enjoy being tolerated that much, since it carries the onus of being at the mercy of a putative majority that often construes its own position to be beyond question.'<sup>273</sup> Thus the perception of liberal toleration, whereby an inferior minority relies upon a dominant majority, oppresses and marginalises minority groups. Connolly's notion of agonistic respect challenges this power relation by employing an alternative understanding of identity. On this interpretation, each identity in pluralist society is both dependent upon and is essential to, the existence of all others. This is quite contrary to the liberal interpretation in which the toleration of minorities relies on acceptance and reaffirmation of majority principles for, whilst the majority employs its superior position to decide which minorities should exist. Connolly thus distinguishes agonistic respect from liberal toleration by 'affirming a more ambiguous relation of interdependence and

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<sup>271</sup> Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, p. 227.

<sup>272</sup> Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p. xxvii.

<sup>273</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 123.

strife between identities over a passing letting the other be.<sup>274</sup> Rather than seeking a dominant consensus in which minorities are tolerated as deviants from the mainstream then, 'agonistic respect "cuts" deeper than tolerance because it folds contestation into the foundations of the putative identity from which liberal tolerance is often derived and delimited.'<sup>275</sup> In this manner, Connolly's notion of agonistic respect allows his theory to advance Gray's critique of toleration by overcoming the oppression highlighted by his *modus vivendi*. In so doing, Connolly employs his interpretation of identity to demonstrate how all components of society are necessarily bound to one another. This consequently forms a more ambiguous power relation in which each component of society must respect the others, ensuring that no superior, dominant group merely tolerates the inferior minority.

Since Connolly's agonistic respect differs from toleration because each identity – including that of the dominant liberal universalism – is entangled in the identity\difference relation, it follows that agonistic respect seeks to challenge dominant codes of morality. Drawing on Foucault's ethical sensibility, Connolly endorses the need to subject current moralities to public 'strip searches'<sup>276</sup> through his agonistic respect. Connolly explains the necessity of ensuring that current dominant values, such as those employed by Rawls, are included in this public contestation. He explains that this prevents the conversion of difference into Otherness; abandons the search for a single identity; and, finally, allows for the evolution of relational possibilities between competing interlinked identities.<sup>277</sup> In this way, agonistic respect seeks to both encourage pluralism and overcome the marginalisation of minority groups in Rawls' society by including them in public engagement, rather than excluding and negating them. It additionally enriches politics by ensuring that

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<sup>274</sup> Connolly, 'Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault,' p. 382.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, p. 382.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 366.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p. 368.



a diversity of views are contested publicly, rather than simply restricting the public sphere to the dominant liberal principles as in the theories of Rawls and Gray. Finally, contrary to Rawls' liberal universalism – which automatically reaffirms its values through toleration and a separate public realm - agonistic respect allows new possibilities to arise through the contestation of current beliefs. Thus, agonistic respect aspires to ensure that the public ethos replaces resentment with contestation; overcomes repression; reduces violence; encourages forbearance and generosity; challenges current moralities; and allows for the emergence of new identities.

In addition to agonistic respect, Connolly's ethos of engagement also requires citizens to practice the notion of Critical Responsiveness toward one another. This notion parallels agonistic respect by calling for citizens to be receptive to other values; rejecting dependence on fixed moral codes; and insisting upon the continuous challenging of existing norms. It diverges from agonistic respect, however, by concerning itself not just with pluralism, but also with new drives of pluralisation.<sup>278</sup> Critical responsiveness advocates self-modification encouraging society to challenge the gut feelings engrained into their identities; reconsider the concepts they take for granted; and work on the way in which those gut feelings affect their understandings of such concepts:

'[Critical responsiveness requires the individual to be] more open to responsive engagement with alternative faiths, sensualities, gender practices, ethnicities, and so on. Doing so to render yourself better able to listen to new and surprising movements in the politics of becoming without encasing them

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<sup>278</sup> Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 146.

immediately in preset judgments that sanctify the universality or naturalness of what you already are.<sup>279</sup>

This employment of self-modification encourages the contestation of existing codes, allowing for the evolution of new ones.<sup>280</sup> In encouraging pluralisation through critical responsiveness in this way, Connolly's ethos aspires to both overcome the exclusionary, oppressive nature of fixed liberal values, and to revive the diversity and deep pluralism that has been suppressed.

Connolly highlights the necessity of pluralisation to his ethos of engagement through his critique of Rawls' fixed system of values. He informs us that 'Rawls wants to freeze the liberal conception of the person and the secular conception of public space today, while everything else in and around the culture undergoes change.'<sup>281</sup> Rawls does respond to similar charges in *An Introduction to Political Liberalism* by claiming to perceive the bounds of reasonableness as evolving over time, expecting the rational consensus to alter slowly as a result.<sup>282</sup> However, I wish to endorse Connolly's critique, viewing Rawls' aforementioned fixed value hierarchy; liberal public sphere; toleration; claims to neutrality; and universalistic terminology such as 'rationality' and 'reasonableness,' as barriers to modification. Connolly informs us that this aim of freezing current values and norms constitutes a further attempt at reaffirming liberal dominance, asserting that Rawls 'wants...persons and the generic facts about them to remain stationary so that liberal justice can be (nearly) sufficient unto itself.'<sup>283</sup> However, Connolly's deep pluralism illustrates that this occurs at the detriment of pluralism, informing us that 'it is even more important to remember that things don't stay still. Even the

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>280</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 127.

<sup>281</sup> Connolly, *Why I am not a Secularist*, p. 66

<sup>282</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 8.

<sup>283</sup> Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, p. 69.

dense, unconscious coding of personhood shifts over time.<sup>284</sup> Since its context is ever-changing then, it is evident that Rawls' liberal universalism suppresses pluralism by restricting future morality to current norms. In order to overcome both the exclusion of minorities and the stifling of diversity that ensue from a politics such as Rawls', Connolly's critical responsiveness thus recommends that we 'cultivate sensitivity to new circumstances and social movements that suggest the possible need to change entrenched habits.'<sup>285</sup> Aletta Norval asserts the necessity of pluralisation to 'existing Western democracies that find the normative and institutional frameworks in which their conceptions of democracy are rooted being questioned.'<sup>286</sup> The revolutionary introduction of women's voting rights in 1918, for instance, demonstrates how displaying this very sensitivity toward women's rights movements led to acknowledgement of the need to modify the framework's engrained norms and assumptions about the two sexes. Hence, in order for pluralisation to overcome current marginalisations and exclusions, critical responsiveness is necessary to 'shake up something in the established world... To propel a fork in political time, throw a wrench into the established code of obligation, goodness, identity, justice, right, or legitimacy.'<sup>287</sup>

In addition to its aspirations of overcoming the exclusion and oppression inflicted by entrenched norms, critical responsiveness also seeks to prevent the suppression of diversity. Connolly recalls the history of ill-treatment toward slaves, atheists and homosexuals, amongst others, in the West in order to illustrate how resistance to change has resulted in wide-spread suffering.<sup>288</sup> The suffering inflicted on these groups highlights how the diversity of social groups, faiths and sexualities has been historically

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>285</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, p. 84.

<sup>286</sup> Norval, Aletta, 'Democracy, Pluralization, and Voice' in *Ethics & Global Politics*, 2 (4): 2009, p.p. 298-299.

<sup>287</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 122.

<sup>288</sup> Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, p. 70.

suppressed as a result of the refusal to alter embedded norms and values. Connolly illustrates that it was the very modification of these norms and values that exposed them to be unjust.<sup>289</sup> Thus, Connolly explains that it is through challenging current norms and employing sensitivity toward new ones through critical responsiveness that pluralisation revives diversity. He asserts that this will 'make us alert to the late-modern politics of diversification, by which new rights, identities, and goods periodically push themselves into being, disrupting fixed conceptions of divinity, justice, faith, rights, identity, and the good.'<sup>290</sup> Thus, rather than suppressing diversity to fit neatly into the existing codes of morality, critical responsiveness modifies the codes of morality to adapt to the current diversity. This revives the diversity that Rawls' liberal universalism suppresses by ensuring that values are dictated by circumstance, and not vice-versa. In this manner, critical responsiveness focuses on pluralisation in which diversity is constantly evolving:

'New and unforeseen things surge into being, such as a new and surprising religious faith, a new source of moral inspiration, a new mode of civilizational warfare, a new cultural identity unsettling an existing constellation of established identities, a new collective good, or the placement of the new right on the existing register of recognized rights.'<sup>291</sup>

Hence, it is through the ability of critical responsiveness to both challenge current exclusionary norms and to revive diversity that new drives to pluralisation arise, deepening pluralism as a result.

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>290</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, p. 80.

<sup>291</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 121.

In addition to cultivating critical responsiveness in order to increase appreciation of diverse others, Connolly also offers critical responsiveness as an expansion of liberal toleration. As suggested through agonistic respect, Connolly appears to share Gray's critique of liberal toleration as a vehicle used simultaneously to reassert the dominant position of the tolerator and the weaker position of the tolerated. The notion of critical responsiveness seeks to destabilise further the relations disrupted by the ambiguous identity relationship of agonistic respect. Connolly asserts that the establishment of a static liberal identity allows toleration to emanate from those at the mainstream centre of society towards those on the margins. However, critical responsiveness contests the stability of the dominant identity, challenging the centrality of its power as a result.<sup>292</sup> As Connolly states, 'where tolerance implies benevolence toward others amid stability of ourselves, critical responsiveness involves active work on our current identities in order to modify the terms of relation between us and them.'<sup>293</sup> In order to explain how this occurs, we must consider both the changing and relational nature of identity in which an individual is defined by what they are not. Since every identity is bound to multiple others, it hence follows that when one identity changes, so too does another. Here, Connolly expands upon Berlin's explanation (in chapter two) of the individual's identity as constituted by the choices he makes, asserting moreover that one's identity is not simply self-transforming, but also evolves through the fluidity of alternate identities. This can be explained through the manner in which the emergence of women's rights movements required the modification of the male identity. Just as men had to alter their perspective of women as secondary citizens, they were also required to modify the status of their own hegemonic identity by abandoning its claims to the embodiment of normality, universality, or superiority. This is

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<sup>292</sup> Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 62.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

evidently quite contrary to the static nature of liberal toleration, in which Rawls 'acts as if his own identity (as "a person") can remain untouched and unchanged as he responds to new and surprising movements of difference'<sup>294</sup>. Rather, Connolly's relational understanding of identity suggests that critical responsiveness requires the continuous renegotiation of one's own identity and the subsequent fluidity of politics. For Connolly, as in Gray's radical politics, such identity renegotiation and its subsequent political contingency, termed by him as 'the politics of becoming,'<sup>295</sup> is vital to pluralisation.

Since public engagement in agonistic respect and critical responsiveness requires the radical choice and contingency that Gray's post-liberalism necessitates, one of the most frequent criticisms charged against Connolly's work is cultural relativism. However, I seek to defend these criticisms before highlighting what I perceive to be much more serious problems. In *Pluralism*, Connolly shows these charges to be false in three ways: by highlighting, firstly, the non-concentric nature of his interpretation of identity; secondly, that the abandonment of absolute standards in his work does not signify the abandonment of *all* standards; and, finally, the necessity of risk of an ethos of responsiveness in defending against the danger posed by unitarianism. Firstly, then, Connolly defines cultural relativism as 'the view that you should support the culture that is dominant in a particular place.'<sup>296</sup> As a result, he clarifies that relativism is usually contextualised by a concentric view of culture in which each culture is isolated territorially. Thus the culture is said 'to radiate from the family to larger circles such as neighborhood, locality, and nation. The largest circles of belonging in turn radiate back to the smaller ones, with each circle entering into relations of resonance with the others.'<sup>297</sup> As a result, Connolly demonstrates how a cultural relativist would actually

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>295</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*.

<sup>296</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 41.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

endorse the dominant beliefs of each particular territory. However, Connolly insists that such an interpretation of culture is incompatible with his deep pluralism which, quite contrary to reducing culture to isolated territories, is 'also alert to eccentric connections that cut across the circles of family, neighborhood, and nation.'<sup>298</sup> This is evident in Connolly's consideration of religious fundamentalists; gay rights advocates; and abortion campaigners, none of whom are confined to a given territory. Indeed, Connolly remarks that it is more likely that universalists with their 'flat pluralism' will perceive culture from a concentric standpoint.<sup>299</sup>

Subsequently, Connolly stresses that the abandonment of absolute standards does not allow politics to decline into no standards at all. He affirms that 'pluralism, particularly of the multidimensional, embedded variety supported here, requires a set of civic virtues to support itself,'<sup>300</sup> but, similar to the contingent radical politics of Gray's post-liberalism, his ethos rejects that these virtues require the fixity that Rawls' value hierarchy relies upon. Consequently, Connolly's agonism, with its foundations of respect and self-modification, seeks to establish an ethos in which to cultivate contingent standards, rather than simply to abolish all standards. He clarifies that, through such an ethos, 'our image of culture encourages us to embrace certain things in this particular place, to be indifferent to some, to be wary of others, and to fight militantly against the continuation of yet others.'<sup>301</sup> Thus, Connolly's thesis is based, not on the withdrawal of all standards, but the employment of general, contestable standards which replace the fixed standards imposed by Rawls' liberal universalism. As Connolly concludes, 'it is thus necessary to set limits, *but pluralists are critical of the self-confidence with which many unitarians endow already existing limits with eternal*

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

necessity.<sup>302</sup> Henceforth, Connolly's theory does not decline into relativism and the abolishment of all standards.

Connolly is aware of the risk involved with regards to the values which might arise as a result of employing contestable standards. However, Connolly measures the uncertainties and ambiguities that accompany agonism against the threat posed by unitarianism, resultantly concluding that this risk is unavoidable. He once again highlights Western societies' history of ill-treatment toward non-Christians; women; homosexuals; mixed-race couples; and unmarried politicians, employing these examples to demonstrate how unitarianism's application of fixed standards has resulted in severe suffering.<sup>303</sup> Connolly perceives this implementation of fixed standards, such as those employed by liberal universalism, as 'pre-emptive strikes against difference.'<sup>304</sup> In Connolly's view, it is thereby imperative to replace these standards with general, contingent virtues in order to overcome the oppression of minorities and the suppression of diversity that results from the imposition of a single hegemonic identity.<sup>305</sup> Furthermore, Connolly suggests that when societies acknowledge the inherent risk of employing contestability, his ethos could actually be enhanced by reminding citizens of the importance of practicing generosity through agonistic respect and critical responsiveness:

'[This risk] reminds us how ethical uncertainty haunts the politics of becoming and how important it is to those who care for the plurivocity of being – or who come to a similar sentiment from different directions – to cultivate an ethos of critical

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p.p. 42-43.

<sup>304</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. xviii.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p.p. xvii-xviii.



responsiveness irreducible to a fixed moral code or abstract conception of the person.<sup>306</sup>

Although as David Howarth observes, Connolly's agonism briefly discusses the requirement of political dimensions in his ethos (micropolitics of action, politics of disturbance, politics of enactment, politics of representational assemblages, interstate relations, politics of non-statist, cross-national movements),<sup>307</sup> his theory does not seek to dictate how such an ethos should be implemented in the political domains of society. Rather, it aspires to provide us the 'tools, resources and suggestions with which we can think and act politically.'<sup>308</sup> Connolly rejects fixed value hierarchies such as Rawls', suggesting instead a set of civic virtues, termed the 'politics of immanence', which seeks to grant citizens the capacity to peacefully coexist amidst their differences.<sup>309</sup> Thus, rather than arising through adherence to a leader, it is Gulshan Khan's contention that for Connolly, regulation results from citizens themselves. Likening Connolly's regulation of society to that of Locke's self-regulating one, Khan demonstrates how citizens in Connolly's ethos regulate themselves through the interconnectedness of their identities. She explains that, for Connolly, it is the paradoxical tension between the agonism of publicly affirming one's own beliefs and the respect of simultaneously listening to and responding to the views of the other that regulates society.<sup>310</sup> Thus as a consequence of employing agonistic respect and critical responsiveness in order for society to self-regulate, Connolly's agonism believes a hierarchy of regulation to be unnecessary.

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<sup>306</sup> Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 69.

<sup>307</sup> Howarth, David R, 'Ethos, Agonism and Populism: William Connolly and the Case for Radical Democracy' in *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10 (2): 2008, p. 175.

<sup>308</sup> Finlayson, Alan, *Democracy and Pluralism - The Political Thought of William E. Connolly*, (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>309</sup> Howarth, p. 175.

<sup>310</sup> Khan, Gulshan Ara, 'An Alternative to Hegemony' in *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10(2): 2008, p. 203.

Yet it is my belief that this regulation of society, reliant upon the interdependency of relations between citizens, does not suffice to surmount the threat of fundamentalism. Connolly rejects fixed value hierarchies such as Rawls' in favour of Gray's contingency, contending that 'the dissolution of foundations does not automatically dissolve ethics: it does so only for those who cannot be ethical without being ordered to do so.'<sup>311</sup> However, surely we must consider that pluralist society *will* include those who cannot practice agonistic respect and critical responsiveness, and hence cannot be ethical without being ordered to do so. Mark Wenman highlights two instances in which Connolly's ethos seems 'woefully inadequate'<sup>312</sup> with regards to such fundamentalists. Firstly, he condemns Connolly's suggestion that 'we need "merely call on the fundamentalist to acknowledge the contestability of its claims to intrinsic moral order and to affirm self-restrictions in the way it advances its agenda in the light of this admission".'<sup>313</sup> Alerting us to the severity of such fundamentalism by turning to those who planned the September 11th attacks, he deems Connolly's ethos to be both naïve of the complexity of pluralist society and insufficient in mediating conflict with violent fundamentalists.<sup>314</sup> Wenman challenges the likelihood that any such fundamentalist – who is prepared to indiscriminately kill those 'infidel' who do not share his convictions – would agree to either accept the contestability of their views, or modify themselves according to the views of others.<sup>315</sup>

Wenman underlines a further threat to Connolly's ethos in highlighting the potential for fundamentalists to refuse engagement in society altogether. He asserts that 'we meet the zero point of Connolly's theorization in his recognition that the invitation to "agonistic reciprocity" may ultimately be

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<sup>311</sup> Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, p. 55.

<sup>312</sup> Wenman, Mark, 'Agonistic Pluralism and Three Archetypal Forms of Politics' in *Contemporary Political Theory*, 2(2): 2003, p.167.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

flatly refused... He is simply silent about what to do when the invitation to constructive agonism is rejected.<sup>316</sup> Connolly's response to this charge remains optimistic, affirming that the possibility of refusal should not suffice to stop us from endeavouring to create such an ethos. He states that 'if circumstance dictates the necessity of such an ethos...then public intellectuals should lead the way in setting the example, rather than decrying the refusal of others to follow one that they have not yet instantiated sufficiently in their own practices.'<sup>317</sup> In spite of considering such optimism to be admirable, it is my contention that Connolly's failure to encourage fundamentalists to participate undermines the very goal of his theory: to reduce fundamentalist conflict throughout pluralist society. Thus, when considered within the current climate of terrorists and rioters, Connolly's ethos alone 'would not be a sufficient political mechanism to bind a complex plurality of citizens.'<sup>318</sup>

Perhaps in addition to questioning the efficacy of Connolly's ethos with respect to mediation between fundamentalists, it would also be necessary to challenge its aspiration to include all components of society. Contrary to Connolly's universal invitation to democratic participation, Wenman states that we need not tolerate those who produce extreme violence and gross inequality.<sup>319</sup> This bears the subsequent question of whether we are obliged to include those who fail to practice the civic virtues, or whether in so doing, it 'concede[s] too much to those who might virulently oppose a radical pluralism.'<sup>320</sup> It seems paradoxical that Connolly's ethos unwaveringly seeks to protect citizens from the threat of oppressive, universalistic doctrines such as Rawls' liberal universalism, whilst failing to consider measures to prevent fundamentalists –

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, p. 173.

<sup>317</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 47.

<sup>318</sup> Wenman, 'Agonistic Pluralism and Three Archetypal Forms of Politics' p. 167.

<sup>319</sup> Wenman, Mark, 'William E. Connolly: Pluralism Without Transcendence' in *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10(2): 2008, p. 164.

<sup>320</sup> Martin, James, *A Post-Secular Faith? Connolly on Pluralism and Evil* in Finlayson, *Democracy and Pluralism – Democracy and Pluralism - The Political Thought of William E. Connolly*, p. 138.

who are prepared to kill indiscriminately those who dispute their ideals – from imposing their universalism on society.

In addition to my concerns of whether fundamentalists would, or indeed should, participate in Connolly's ethos of engagement, I worry that Connolly's ethos could fail to access other components of pluralist society. Connolly states that agonism can 'crack the ice of fundamentalism',<sup>321</sup> by overcoming class inequalities through reducing social resentment. However, Young rightfully highlights the potential exclusion of underprivileged sectors of society from accessing Connolly's ethos. She asserts that Connolly's agonism requires the 'relative social privilege enjoyed by political theorists.'<sup>322</sup> I share her anxiety over the material conditions necessary for Connolly's ethos, wondering how, for instance, ethics of contestability and self-modification could access deprived, uneducated individuals. This is evident when we consider those involved in the 2011 UK riots of which, disregarding the opportunists, there was an apparent trend of young, deprived men feeling 'trapped in the system.'<sup>323</sup> It seems naïve to believe that deprived individuals, such as the UK rioters, would be willing, or indeed able, to participate in an ethos that requires them to 'come to terms with the degree to which [their philosophy/faith] remains contestable on comparative terms.'<sup>324</sup> When applied, Connolly's agonism thus fails to reduce social resentment thereby preventing it from overcoming the marginalisation and oppression of those on the fringes of society. This once again calls into question the effectiveness of his agonism in achieving its goal of relieving the social fragmentation and fundamentalist conflict present in pluralist society.

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<sup>321</sup> Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 133.

<sup>322</sup> Young, Iris Marion, 'Review [untitled]' in *Political Theory* 20(3): 1992, p. 514.

<sup>323</sup> Lewis, Paul and Harkin, James, *Who Are The Rioters? Young Men from Poor Areas... but that's not the full story* [online]. The Guardian, 2011 [viewed 11August]. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/09/london-riots-who-took-part>

<sup>324</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 41.

The gap in Connolly's theory, regarding its failure to consider sufficiently the treatment of fundamentalists; to draw boundaries of inclusion; and to include underprivileged sectors of society, emerges from an institutional gap in the ethos. Iris Marion Young highlights the necessity of institutions:

'Political theory specifically should contribute an account of how institutions and political movements might construct their rules, policies, membership, and decision making about means and ends in hopes of fostering social and material conditions better enabling people to accept the difference in themselves and respect adversaries.'<sup>325</sup>

She subsequently contends that, on the contrary, 'Connolly offers precious few institutional recommendations.'<sup>326</sup> Connolly defends his theory, asserting that, although his work encompasses tactics 'of the self applied to the self,' it does so within the context of a democratic ethos whereby social movements highlight the institutions that resonate with his thinking. He consequently rejects Young's dismissal of his agonism as 'therapeutic rather than institutional.'<sup>327</sup> Indeed, the importance of social movements to Connolly's ethos is evident, for instance, in those movements that fought for the rights of women and gays. However, I share Young's concerns about the extent to which Connolly considers the importance of institutions to his ethos. As already stated, it is my contention that Connolly's theory seeks to provide citizens with the tools necessary for the generation of an ethos of engagement. He does not aspire to give an institutionalised account of agonism. Yet, I believe that the applicability of Connolly's theory would be

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<sup>325</sup> Young, 'Review [untitled],' p. 514.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p. 514.

<sup>327</sup> Connolly, William E, 'Identifying the Difference' in *Political Theory* 21(1): 1993, p. 129.

greatly strengthened if it were to incorporate both public institutions and a motivational narrative into its ethos.

Primarily then, it is vital that, whilst Connolly's agonism seeks to open up possibilities of deliberation by reworking the fixed liberal public-private separation, some boundaries are still maintained between the public and the private. This is imperative to preventing fundamentalism since the complete lack of such a boundary 'is the symptom of a void that can endanger democracy, because that void provides a terrain that can be occupied by the extreme right to articulate new antidemocratic political identities.'<sup>328</sup> Thus, in constructing a frontier between the public and private spheres, Connolly's work could reduce the threat of fundamentalism. It is essential to ensure that such a frontier does not allow an incontestable dominant identity (i.e. the fixed boundaries of liberal universalism) to impose itself onto society, and it is hence useful to turn to the work of Chantal Mouffe in how she attempts to prevent this. She explains the necessity of redrawing the liberal public-private separation, whilst ensuring its contingency in order to avoid it becoming oppressive. Employing the example of abortion, she demonstrates how conflicting conceptions of the good in pluralist society sometimes spill over inevitably into the public sphere of the political, and resultantly, 'the frontier between public and private is not given once and for all but constructed and constantly shifting.'<sup>329</sup> In recognising that such a boundary will inevitably change alongside its shifting political context, Mouffe's insistence on contingency prevents her public-private divide from being oppressive.

In order to employ a public-private divide that aims to prevent fundamentalism, it is imperative to develop some public institutions. It has

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<sup>328</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p.p. 5-6.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

already been discussed how Connolly's ethos, though beneficial to the relations between some citizens, is not sufficient in dealing with fundamentalists. Henceforth, it is here that public institutions could enhance Connolly's theory. Drawing on Stuart Hampshire's suggestion that the development of these institutions is not mutually exclusive with Connolly's ethos, Martin asserts that 'we ought to recognise, too, the impact of public practices and procedures of conflict and argumentation in shaping our ethical dispositions towards each other.'<sup>330</sup> In Martin's view then, which I strongly wish to endorse, the implementation of institutions could enrich Connolly's agonism. He continues, explaining that, rather than simply relying on citizens to 'think twice' with respect to their relations with the other, the institutions themselves 'might expose them to alternative and competing points of view.'<sup>331</sup> David Owen advances this stance, explaining that such institutions would, firstly, provide 'substantive concrete expression to the identity of citizens as rulers and ruled,' and, secondly, build on deliberative plurality by recognising pluralism throughout the decision-making procedure.<sup>332</sup> As examples of the former, Owen focuses on the democratic element of institutions, such as participatory budgeting; citizens' assemblies; citizens' juries; and uses of direct democracy, to act as tools of expression for citizens. Meanwhile, he recommends that, in order to recognise the pluralist context in which decisions are made, institutions should steer away from deliberation and decision-making procedures that result in the polarisation of politics.<sup>333</sup> For instance, it seems reasonable to suppose that Owen would endorse a Proportional Representation voting in order to reflect the diversity of views in society. Thus in encouraging both the recognition of a plurality of views and the constant contestation of the dominant views, institutions could work

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<sup>330</sup> Martin, 'A Post-Secular Faith,' p. 138.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>332</sup> Owen, David, 'Pluralism and the Pathos of Distance (or: How to Relax with Style): Connolly, Agonistic Respect and the Limits of Political Theory' in *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10(2): 2008, p. 224.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 224.

alongside Connolly's notions of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness in order to enhance its aspirations. Owen asserts that the employment of such institutions would have a positive effect on Connolly's theory. He believes them to 'overcome the "gap" in Connolly's argument concerning the compatibility of an ethos of agonistic respect with democratic pluralism... lead[ing] to the specification of some criteria for reflecting on, and intervening in, political practice from issues of local activism to policy orientation to institutional design.'<sup>334</sup> Hence, in combining Connolly's ethos of generosity with institutional designs, it renders it applicable to democratic society.

Martin asserts, however, that the development of such institutions still does not suffice in mediating between conflicting others. He asserts that in order to '[transform] the tendency to nihilate others into a common aversion to our own silencing,' it is imperative that we create a narrative that provides us with the motivation to engage with the other. This seems evident if we consider the unlikelihood of fundamentalists such as the September 11<sup>th</sup> hijackers to engage in Connolly's ethos. Martin demonstrates how this is depicted in Mouffian agonism, which draws on Carl Schmitt's assumption that the political 'is linked to the existence of an element of hostility among human beings.'<sup>335</sup> Mouffe focuses on the significance of such hostility, demonstrating how the antagonisms that arise from it can be used to generate competition in order to motivate engagement. Martin affirms that it is this pull of antagonism that provokes adversaries into a shared, but contested, political space where differences are open to rearticulation, and one must participate in order to safeguard one's own beliefs from the antagonism of his adversary.<sup>336</sup> Mouffe's narrative thereby shares Connolly's notion of identity in which 'every identity is relational and...the condition of existence of every identity is the affirmation

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid, p. 224.

<sup>335</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p. 2.

<sup>336</sup> Martin, 'A Post-secular faith,' p. 140.



of a difference.<sup>337</sup> However, in her narrative, rather than simply inviting citizens to practice respect toward one other and relying on their ethical motivations to accept (as Connolly does), adversaries are instead provoked into engagement with one another in which they must participate in order to both protect their own identity and contest that of the other. Their participation ensures continual contestation, and resultantly prevents one identity from eradicating all others. Hence, Mouffe's narrative aspires to stimulate unity by transforming conflict between different competing identities into 'the positivity of common spaces of engagement.'<sup>338</sup> Entirely compatible with Connolly's notion of identity, such a narrative could motivate citizens into engaging with the other in the name of protecting their identity and contesting those that challenge it. As Martin explains it, those who refuse to renounce their metaphysicality are likely to perceive Mouffe's narrative more as 'a provocation to adversarial conflict than a polite invitation to a dialogue that respects the integrity of faith.' Perhaps this could fill the motivational gap that exists in Connolly's theory with respect to fundamentalists either who refuse to practice agonistic respect and critical responsiveness, or who altogether refuse participation.

Additionally, a motivational narrative such as Mouffe's sets limits on the public realm by specifying that engagement between adversaries must operate within a certain framework of values. Contrary to Connolly's ethos, which refrains from employing a framework of boundaries, Mouffe's agonism requires a framework of values within which contestation occurs between adversaries. The label 'enemy' is given to 'those who do not accept the democratic "rules of the game" and who thereby exclude themselves from the political

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<sup>337</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p. 2.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

community.”<sup>339</sup> Martin describes such a framework as setting ‘hegemonic’ and ‘post-metaphysical’ limits on plurality.<sup>340</sup> The contingent limits of Mouffe’s agonistic framework thus overcome both the oppressiveness attributed to Rawls’ liberal universalism, and the inadequacy of Connolly’s theory to deal with fundamentalists. Mouffe avoids creating another oppressive framework by repeatedly insisting upon its contingency in which the framework itself is constantly up for contestation and re-evaluation. Moreover, the limits placed by Mouffe on agonistic conflict are extremely helpful to Connolly’s ethos of generosity. The contestable boundaries that she constructs ensure that those who participate in public engagement refrain from violent conflict and unitarianism by placing limits on those who can engage, excluding those who refuse to adhere to the value framework. However her insistence on the necessarily contingent nature of such values - in which the framework evolves alongside the evolution of politics - prevents such a framework from echoing the oppressive element of liberal values, whilst also placing sufficient limits to prevent the universal imposition of a fundamentalist doctrine.

It is my belief, however, that in combining Connolly’s ethos with both institutions and a motivational narrative, it should seek to avoid the clear-cut distinction that Mouffe’s terminology employs to distinguish between those who engage in the ethos, and those who are excluded. Mouffe defines the ‘adversary’ as the other to compete with, and the ‘enemy’ as one who, either refuses to operate within the framework, or who refuses entirely to engage with the other.<sup>341</sup> In applying a motivational narrative, Mouffe attempts to transform those ‘enemies’ - who in all likelihood would refuse to engage in Connolly’s ethos - into ‘adversaries’ who are willing to participate in society. Martin asserts that in so doing, she ‘successfully distinguish[es] adversaries

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>341</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p. 4.

from antagonists, disputants from outright enemies.<sup>342</sup> However, I find this terminology problematic in a way that parallels my resistance to liberal labels of 'unreasonable' and 'irrational.' By using language through which the excluded are defined as the 'enemy,' Mouffe polarises citizens, thereby aggravating the fragmentation of the excluded. I share her view of the necessity of setting limits in order to prevent fundamentalists from imposing their way of life on society, however I refute the labelling of fundamentalists as the 'enemy.' Hence, Connolly's ethos could be greatly enhanced if it were combined with supporting institutions and a motivational narrative such as Mouffe's, but in order to avoid further exclusion and fragmentation of those fundamentalists who already endanger peace, we should avoid aggravating labels.

In sum then, Connolly's ethos of generosity advances post-liberal ideals of radical choice and contingency. It does so, firstly, in its rejection of conventional pluralism whereby diversity is restricted to the status quo. Then, his elimination of madness in faith through the recognition of the relationality and interconnectedness of identity demonstrates the need for engagement in society, thus rendering the public-private renegotiation a necessity. Within this reworked public sphere, Connolly's notions of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness allow citizens to reduce violent conflict and promote positive engagement through acknowledging the contestability of one's beliefs and modifying the self in relation to the other. Both of these notions develop the notion of liberal toleration into a more ambiguous identity relationship in which the fluidity of identity destabilises the dominant liberal ideology. This allows for the revival of democracy; more possibilities for pluralisation; and the overcoming of an oppressive and exclusionary hegemony. Furthermore, Connolly defends his thesis against charges of cultural relativism, a critique

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<sup>342</sup> Martin, 'A Post-Secular Faith,' p. 140.

that is incompatible with his understanding of pluralism. Instead, he sees risk as an inevitable component of pluralist society, in which its constant presence may even encourage citizens to practice agonistic respect and critical responsiveness toward one another. However, I believe that such an ethos is not sufficient in mediating between fundamentalists. Consideration of the possibility (and, probability) that fundamentalists either will not practice such respect and responsiveness whilst engaging in the public realm or will altogether refuse participation signifies a lack in Connolly's theory. It appears to me that his self-regulating society would benefit from institutions which compliment the aims of his theory whilst also ensuring that the ethos is not threatened by fundamentalists. Additionally, it seems that to encourage wider participation in the ethos, a motivational narrative could be extremely effective in provoking adversaries into contestation. Such a narrative would also seek to provide the contingent, contestable framework of values which could again assist in resisting fundamentalism. However, in combining such an ethos with both institutions and a motivational narrative, Connolly's ethos should refrain from incorporating the provocative terms used by those such as Mouffe. Through supplementing Connolly's ethos with these elements, it is my contention that the narrative could provide motivation for a wider diversity of people to engage in public participation, and that the institutions could protect the ethos from fundamentalism and extremism.

## ***Conclusion***

### ***Prospects for a Global Agonism***

*'In an age of globalization of economic relations, communications, ecological effects, nuclear danger, gender issues, race issues, and so on, it is imperative to the ethos of democracy to generate cross-national, nonstatist modes of political action that exceed the political boundaries of any state.'*

(William E. Connolly, 1995)

Rawls' liberal universalism provides us with a commendable attempt at conflict mediation. *A Theory of Justice* aspires to construct a political conception distinct from the various conflicting conceptions in society, whilst *Political Liberalism* attempts to create an overlapping consensus that is impartial toward divergent comprehensive doctrines. In so doing, liberal universalism aims to create objective political theories that seek to both remove conflict from the public arena and remain impartial from conflict in the private arena. This constitutes an attempt at reducing conflict and mediating between diverse doctrines. Rawls' divergence from earlier forms of liberalism comprises an attempt at providing a fair, equal and stable framework that neither benefits nor harms any particular sector of society. However, this dissertation has exposed a flaw in Rawls' theory whereby liberal universalist claims to neutrality are false and its values represent one particular conception of the good. Since we are unable to detach ourselves from our own assumptions, the 'view from nowhere' approach of liberal universalism is flawed. In examining liberal universalist claims to neutrality, it is evident that its universal authority is reliant upon a range of exclusions of minority groups; ethnic communities; and religions. In upholding neutrality and universality in this way, liberal universalism renders itself an oppressive doctrine. It becomes incontestable and unchallengeable. As a result, fundamentalist conflict may actually be aggravated, rather than mediated, by oppressing minority groups and fragmenting those sectors of society that do not adhere to liberal principles. In this way, liberal universalism itself becomes a form of

fundamentalism. Consequently, liberal universalism does not encourage diversity, but stifles it. Diversity is suppressed by the liberal universalist emphasis on a fixed public-private separation in which the public sphere is governed by 'neutral' liberal values. As a result of aspirations toward neutrality, the liberal values exercised in the public sphere become void of substance. Furthermore, the public-private divide is exclusionary to minority groups as it fails to recognise the spill over of private interests into the public domain. Additionally, these exclusions are rendered oppressive by the fact that it is the dominant sector of society who decides where to draw the boundaries between the public, non-public and private spheres. In this manner, liberal universalism restricts citizens from employing the individual freedom and toleration that it claims to grant them, once again oppressing and fragmenting minority groups in pluralist society and increasing the potential for fundamentalist conflict. In spite of its admirable attempts at providing a fair, equal and stable theory, neutral toward pluralist conflict, there is an underlying oppressive element within liberal universalism in which false claims to neutrality and universality are employed to reaffirm the liberal hegemony and suppress diversity.

Post-liberalism aims to overcome the oppression of the liberal hegemony that is outlined in the first chapter. It admirably rejects the liberal universalist focus on neutrality and universality, asserting the impossibility of distancing ourselves from our attachments. Gray illustrates the entanglement of liberal values by demonstrating the incompatible and incommensurable conflict that occurs, for example, between negative and positive liberty. As a result, Gray emphasises the necessity of abandoning theories based on fixed value hierarchies, such as Rawls' liberal universalism which ranks justice as the first value. Gray insists that in focusing on rationality in this way, liberal universalism imposes a certain way of life on all of its citizens, preventing

them from using circumstance and context to dictate the outcome of value conflict. Instead, Gray affirms radical choice through which minorities decide the outcome of value conflict on a circumstantial basis, overcoming the oppression caused by the liberal universalist hegemony. It follows from this that all decision-making should be contingent and that even if certain values form the current dominant norms, they are always open to contestation and challenge. This ensures that post-liberalism overcomes the oppressive element of liberal universalism whereby its employment of neutrality and universality ensure the reaffirmation of its values. However, it is my contention that Gray's theory is flawed in its failure to consider a reworking of the public-private divide. The existence of a fixed division between public and private matters appears to be inconsistent with the view that we cannot ever separate ourselves from our attachments. Surely if an anti-abortion campaigner must leave his attachments in the private sphere, he cannot exercise his radical choice when voting on abortion legislation in the political sphere. Similarly, the post-liberal insistence on a more radical political decision-making process, which abandons the consultation of a pre-ranked set of values, cannot be fulfilled without a renegotiation of the fixed public-private divide. Under the current public-private divide, Gray's work fails to overcome oppression because minority beliefs and assumptions are prohibited from the public realm and suppressed into the private sphere. Radical choice can only be *radical* if people are encouraged to bring their conceptions of the good into the public sphere. Finally, Gray's abandonment of universality and favouring of contingency is flawed as a result of the fixed public-private distinction which renders impossible the contestation of current dominant principles. Hence, although Gray's work provides an admirable attempt at overcoming the hegemony and oppression of liberal universalism through the abandonment of neutrality and universality and its alternate promotion of radical choice and



contingency, it requires a renegotiation of the public-private distinction if it is to work.

Agonism builds on the advances of post-liberalism with regards to overcoming the oppressive nature of the liberal hegemony. It rejects the notion of conventional pluralism in which diversity can only operate within the status quo, overcoming the hegemonic nature of liberal boundaries. In so doing, agonism favours the necessity of public engagement and contestation of beliefs and values, as opposed to the liberal universalist relegation of such beliefs and values to the private realm. Connolly perceives the reworking of the public-private divide to be essential to his understanding of identity in which all are relational and necessarily interconnected. As a result, agonism overcomes the oppression of the fixity of the liberal public-private sphere by encouraging comprehensive doctrines to enter the public sphere for contestation. In outlining this agonistic public sphere, Connolly employs the notion of agonistic respect which seeks to problematise the power relation of liberal universalist toleration, in which the powerful normally grant toleration to the powerless. In this way, minorities in society are reliant upon the dominant sectors, and must reaffirm the dominant norms if they are to be tolerated. Agonistic respect transforms this relationship into a more ambiguous power relation whereby all identities are equally dependent on one another, consequently overcoming the liberal universalist oppression of minorities. Critical responsiveness is also applied in Connolly's agonistic public sphere, encouraging new possibilities of pluralism to emerge, termed 'pluralization'. This allows agonism to overcome the oppression that liberal universalism inflicts on those outside the status quo. Although agonism has rightly defended itself against charges of cultural relativism, I assert that Connolly's theory is, however, problematic as a result of its insufficient institutions and motivational narrative. By providing an ethos alone, Connolly

is overly optimistic about participation in the public realm, preventing it from overcoming the oppression of the fixed liberal public-private sphere in practice. Instead, I contend that Connolly's agonism would be greatly enhanced if it were to be supplemented by complementary institutions which both ensure the possibility of participation and set contestable boundaries to participation. In this way, liberal universalist oppression can be overcome by both ensuring access to participation and preventing a decline into relativism. Additionally, I affirm that Connolly's ethos does not suffice to motivate actors into engagement, rendering it unable to overcome the liberal universalist suppression of politics. In order to do so, my research suggests that Connolly's ethos is combined with a motivational narrative, such as Mouffe's competing adversaries, which provokes citizens into engagement by encouraging them to protect their values against the contestation of one another. Thus, agonism provides a noble attempt at opening up a public sphere of engagement and contestability in order to overcome both the liberal universalist oppression of minorities and suppression of diversity. Yet, Connolly's theory fails both in providing the institutions to support his ethos and in offering citizens a motivation to engage, thereby calling its ability to overcome oppression and suppression of diversity into question.

Highlighted by international terrorism such as September 11<sup>th</sup>, pluralist value conflict is evidently not restricted to the domestic arena. Transnational movements - such as anti-abortion campaigners; pro-euthanasia activists; and those seeking to advance rights for homosexuals - illustrate the global dimension of value conflict whereby similar issues resound throughout the world. As a result of the global dimension of value conflict, fundamentalist threats; social fragmentation; and violent conflict also occur on a global level. There is an evident need then, for an agonism that does not simply limit itself to mediation in the domestic realm, but also acknowledges the necessity of

acting globally in order to mediate pluralist conflict. This is highly compatible with Connolly's theory in which he perceives all identities to be relational and necessarily interdependent. Globalisation consequently intensifies the relational and interdependent element of citizens around the world who face identical environmental; social; and political issues. Connolly does acknowledge this need for forming cross-state connections, affirming the global expansion of agonism to be 'imperative to the ethos of democracy'.<sup>343</sup> Yet, his institutional deficit leaves Connolly's theory vulnerable to fundamentalist oppression and proves his agonism to be insufficient in ensuring participation on a global scale. Similarly, his failure to provide a motivation for engagement renders his agonism insufficient in overcoming the suppression of politics in the international arena. It is thereby my contention that these insufficiencies constitute a serious gap within Connolly's agonism, inhibiting it from meeting the current need for conflict mediation which operates beyond state boundaries. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate the need to supplement Connolly's agonism with both complimentary institutions and a motivational narrative. These complementary institutions will enhance Connollyan agonism by guaranteeing global participation and setting contingent boundaries on the framework of participation. Simultaneously, the introduction of a motivational narrative will provoke reluctant participants into a public contestation of international values. I am hopeful that consideration of these two elements will enable Connolly's agonism to be applied on a global scale, allowing it to overcome the oppression of liberal universalism and revive the diversity of politics, thereby acting as a mediator of value conflict around the world. My forthcoming doctoral research will aspire to fill this gap by exploring the specificity of the institutions and motivations required to enhance Connolly's work, enabling it to become a key player in international conflict reduction.

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<sup>343</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 131.

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